

Power Domination and Resistance in George Orwell's *Shooting an Elephant* and Louise Erdrich's *Snares*Sedunath Dhakal^{1*}**Abstract**

This article examines the relationship between power and resistance as depicted in George Orwell's 'Shooting an Elephant' and Louise Erdrich's 'Snares'. Power is viewed as a complex social structure that enables domination and creates inequality between groups. In response, resistance emerges in different forms, either direct or indirect. Using theoretical insights from Michel Foucault, Lila Abu-Lughod, and James C. Scott, this article explores how marginalized individuals resist dominant forces through both public and hidden actions. In 'Shooting an Elephant', the Burmese people show subtle, indirect resistance to British colonial rule, with the killing of the elephant which symbolizes decline of imperial power reflecting a quiet but powerful form of protest. On the other hand, 'Snares' presents a more open and direct form of resistance, as Native American characters fight back against the exploitation and land-grabbing of immigrant settlers. By comparing these two texts, the article shows how resistance, though shaped by time, place, and social conditions, is a natural response to power. Both texts illustrate that even those with limited means can find ways—symbolic or direct—to challenge domination.

Keywords: power, domination, resistance, discourse, decolonization, exploitation

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Introduction

Power is a system or mechanism constructed and set as a structure in the society to control and rule over others. It is a “complex structure, conceived as a circulating medium within what is formed a political system” (Parsons, 1963, p. 236). Thus, the power always exists in relation to the social structure and its people. Power creates a discourse and truth (Foucault, 1972) that is to be acceptable to most of all. It is conventional and helps maintain the hierarchy between powerful and powerless. The powerful people dominate and rule over the powerless in a way or other using the power constructed and gained. Power is time and context specific; and thus, it changes when the time and context change. Since it is the capacity to control over other people in the society, it is always in relation between two actors. That's why "the power is not an absolute, it's relative and asymmetrical" (Wrong, 1968, p. 673).

Resistance is a way of negating the power or protesting against it. Powerless people who are dominated and suppressed in the society always try to be free from such suppression. So, they try to resist against the power directly or indirectly. In condition that they are organized and if they think that they can protest publicly, they resist the power openly or in the direct way. If they are weak and not organized for the protest, they resist the power indirectly, in a hidden way. This type of power domination and resistance against the power is a continuous process of society. It occurs at any time everywhere, but the forms of domination and the resistance may be different. Thus, the reality of the continuation of society is the dichotomy of power and resistance. This paper aims to explain two different forms of resistance over the power domination in two different societies as it has been depicted by George Orwell's narrative autobiographical essay, *Shooting an Elephant* and Louis Erdrich's story, *Snares*. There is an indirect or hidden way of protesting and ignoring the power by the local Burmese against the colonial power in George Orwell's *Shooting an Elephant* and a direct protest against the exploitation of immigrants in North American society in Louise Erdrich's *Snares*. Both are powerful forms of resistance against the power domination. The paper describes in detail about the impacts of the domination of the British colonial power over the native Burmese and how the natives reacted against the power in the time of decolonization in the 1920s in Orwell's *Shooting an Elephant*. In the same way, it deals with how the Native American people (*Chipua* tribe) were dominated and exploited by the European immigrants, and how the natives could resist against such power domination in Erdrich's story, *Snares*.

Interface between Power and Resistance

Power is a social force that is constructed in a society with the help of 'knowledge and that creates the truth' which everybody follows. It is also the process of 'discursive formation' (Abhrams, 1999). When there is power structure, there may occur resistance. Power and resistance are two inevitable and interdependent characteristics of society which have been in social practice from the evolution of human society. According to Michel Foucault "where there is power, there is resistance" (quoted in Abu – Lughod, 1991, p. 42). There is an interface between power and resistance. Resistance is against power or simply, to gain the power. The powerless always want to get the power, so they revolt, that is called resistance. "The resistance is the means by which power further strengthens itself" (Bertens, 200, p. 153). When there is resistance, there is power" (Abu -Lughod, 1991, p. 42). Resistance can be in indirect or hidden form, and sometimes it is direct protest against the power in an organized way that is understood as the revolution. According to Lila Abu - Lughod, resistance can occur in different forms in the society, like resistance to marriage, resistance in the folk songs or by creating oral forms of poetry, impudent sexual discourse, and defying or resisting other minor activities of the power holders. Resisting and protesting directly against the power is not easy, so the subordinates take different indirect ways or the forms of resistance. It is onstage and offstage too for which James C. Scott called "hidden transcript and public transcript" (Scott, 1992, p. 4).

When there is extreme form of domination, the dominated person always tries to find out the way to resist against; and if it is directly not possible, he/she uses 'hidden transcript' But, if the dominated thinks that it can be and should be done openly, the resistance will be a 'public transcript' (Scott, 1992, p. 4). Sometimes it may result a collective movement if it unites the large mass of exploited group for attaining the collective goals by protesting against the power. The way powerless show the hidden transcript is directly and indirectly felt by the power holders. It can be shared to the subordinates, or it is publicly exposed which may form a collective resistance. So, as Foucault says, power domination creates the situation of resistance in the society. Society exists and continues in relation between the power holders and the subordinates, ruler and ruled, and this dichotomy exists in a way or other everywhere. When there remains power domination, resistance is inevitable.

Power Domination and Resistance in *Shooting an Elephant*

Shooting an Elephant is written in the context of British colonialism in Burma in the late 1920s when the local Burmese had been facing a lot of troubles because of the British people's domination to rule over the locals. British colonialism in Burma began in 1824 A. D. and it remained there up to 1932 A. D. George Orwell, the writer himself got such

experience while he was working as a colonial officer in India and Burma. So, this is based on the essayist's own autobiographical experience. The narrator in *Shooting an Elephant* is a British police officer working in Burma who is sharing his personal experience while he was working in Moulmein, Burma. At the time of decolonization; local Burmese used to hate and neglect the European white people (Orwell, 1991, p. 77). The elephant is shot dead by the narrator, a colonial agent because of the pressure of the native people, which symbolizes the end of colonial power from Burma. The British officer could not ignore the frequent pressure of the local Burmese. These native Burmese could not directly protest against the colonial power because they were weak and uneducated and they were afraid of getting arrested. So, in the essay, when the elephant was killed, which means the colonialism was ended, they became very happy and had a great celebration on that occasion (Orwell, 1991, p. 79). After the elephant was shot dead, thousands of local people gathered around and shared the flesh of the elephant as a cultural feast in their locality. It is a matter of freedom they felt after the end of colonial power.

Shooting the elephant is an act of chasing and defeating over the British colonialism from Burma. It is the resistance against the colonial power that has been dominating over the native Burmese for more than a century. It is the time of decolonization in Burma, and Orwell himself had once been there as an officer who observed the native's hatred, and resistance towards the colonial power. So, this essay can be read and analyzed as a form of post colonial resistance. The native Burmese were weak and weaponless in front of the powerful colonizer, the British who had been powerful because of their reason and enlightenment as well as the weapon to overpower the uneducated and weak people in Burma. It's a form of revenge resulted from the hatred as the narrator says;

Anti - European feeling was very bitter. No one had the guts to raise a riot, but if a European woman went through the bazaars alone somebody would probably spit betel juice over her dress. . . . When a nimble Burman tripped me up on the football field and the referee (another Burman) looked the other way, the crowd yelled with hideous laughter. (Orwell, 1991, p. 78)

Native Burmese had strong sense of hatred against the British people who had colonized and ruled over the Burmese for long. They were so tired and fed up of British brutal exploitation that in every way and everywhere they denied and disliked the presence of white, English people. The narrator, British colonial police officer narrates an event of spitting betel juice by the natives to European women. Spitting betel juice from behind is a hidden or offstage resistance over the power. It is because they could not directly resist against the powerful British. This is a sense of protest and anger of native people against the colonial power, the anti-colonial resistance. This is an extreme form of hatred.

The weak and powerless people cannot resist directly against the powerful ones. The rules, regulations, and the set of systems have been made by the power holders in the society.

The colonizer, on the one hand, undermines the native as a half-human due to their superstitious practices, while on the other hand, weaponizes their superstitions against them to exploit them. (Mukherjee & Gosh, 2023, p. 85) The weak don't have the authority over the resources and they have to face the dangerous consequences if they publicly try to protest. So, they do it indirectly indicating the power holders from the behind. The native Burmese were weaker in front of the powerful British colonial officer, so whatever they showed the resistance against the European or the British people is an indirect resistance. James C. Scott defines such indirect forms of resistance to power as 'hidden transcripts' (Scott, 1992, p. 5). He writes;

If subordinate discourse in the presence of the dominant is a public transcript, I shall use the term *hidden transcript* to characterize discourse that takes place "offstage," beyond direct observation by powerholders. The hidden transcript is thus derivative in the sense that it consists of those offstage speeches, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in the public transcript. (Scott, 1992, p. 5)

The local Burmese seemed very weak and coward in front of the colonial officers who had knowledge and weapons to control everything to rule over the natives in Burma in the colonial period. Yet, they try to show their resistance in hidden or indirect ways as the narrator says; "In the end the sneering yellow faces of the young men that met me everywhere, the insults hooted after me when I was at a safe distance, got badly on my nerves" (Orwell, 1991, p. 78). They could not comment on the narrator directly but he listened that they were insulting him harshly.

Although the narrator is constantly jeered by the Burmese, and so, he felt that he is "a puppet, both in the hands of British Empire and two thousand people who press him to do what he does not want" (Ghaforian & Gholi, 2015, p. 1364). Then he sympathizes with them due to the sufferings that the British Empire has caused. After he had killed the elephant, the Burmese people "raced across the mud with dahs and baskets on hand and stripped its body almost to the bones" (Orwell, 1991, p. 83) But the narrator did not wait for its death after he shot it and went away. Elephant symbolizes the British colonial power, and shooting the elephant is ending the colonialism from Burma. The natives enjoyed the occasion of shooting the elephant a lot. They celebrated it as if it's a great ceremony and jubilant occasion for the natives. They were free from the uncontrolled wild like elephant. It was the freedom they got after many years from the domination of the British colonialism. This is a historic occasion for celebration: decolonization which is the end of all forms of power

ruling over them. In this way, the essay reflects the struggle to get freedom from the historic domination of the western empires for over the centuries.

Power Domination and Resistance in *Snares*

Louise Erdrich's *Snares* is a story about the open resistance of the Native Americans who were dominated and exploited by two immigrant land brokers, Lazarre and Morrissey. These two brokers frighten and capture the land, and properties of the innocent native people. But, both of them are snared as a revenge of humiliation of having seen Margaret's braids cut off when she did not sign the document which could legally transfer her land into them. The story thus depicts how the native North Americans protest against the domination of immigrants in their society for the survival. It is an explicit or direct form of resistance over the power domination.

The main characters of the story, Nanapush, Margaret and Lulu, the Native Americans, were returning from the church after attending the Benediction when they heard the footsteps of someone pursuing them. They were afraid of and walked faster, but on the half way they were suddenly attacked by the land brokers, Lazarre and Morrissey. They wanted Margaret, the Native American to sign her land papers. Both Nanapush and Margaret were trapped by Lazarre and Morrissey who were powerful in front of weak natives. Lulu, the daughter of Margaret had been already hidden somewhere in the nearby bush. When Margaret refused to sign the document, they brutally attacked and hit them. They made Nanapush unconscious and shaved Margaret's braids which was a very bad sign in Native American tradition.

After they reached home Fluer saw them in such a pathetic condition and became very angry. She herself shaved her hair and went out to seek Lazarre to fight against. This is a form of direct protest against the power when there is extreme domination and exploitation. In the mean time, Nanapush fixed an old fashioned 'snare' for Morrissey. He dug the land on the way from where Morrissey would return. Then, while Morrissey was returning home along the way he was trapped into the snare Nanapush had fixed. It signifies how the power holders who exploit others misusing the power are trapped into.

The old would be couple, Nanapush and Margaret could not resist against such powerful brokers, as the narrator says "We walked out into the night again. Speechless, we made our way in fierce pain down the road. I was damaged in spirit, more so than Margaret" (Erdrich, 1991, p. 487). But it was possible from the young girl Fluer. The younger generation had the determination and strength to resist over the domination upon them from the emigrants. Fluer also represents the empowerment of female because of which the resistance is possible; and it became possible only from the young female. Fluer has her own

method of dealing with such dangerous group of men. She is daring and fearless, she can use the power of spell, ancient Chippewa spirits too to attack such men. She possesses magical power related to her femininity, sexual power. The fact that Fluer shaves her own head and goes towards Morrissey indicates that she too has power, an ability to resist over as a revenge of brutal exploitation and discrimination.

In this way, the story, *Snare* illustrates that the young Native Americans are capable to resist over any form of domination done upon them by the immigrants. They properly planned to protest against the domination of Morrissey and Lazarre who were always exploiting them. The narrator says; "So, I decided to accomplish revenge as quickly as possible. I was talker who used my brains as my weapon. When I haunted, I preferred to let my game catch itself" (Erdrich, 1991, p. 489). According to their plan, they made a snare to trap those two brokers who were always exploiting and oppressing them. They also thought that it should be stronger enough so that they could trap those guys who were torturing them to transform the legal rights of the land. Since they were the natives they had enough land which the brokers wanted to capture, so they would torture the natives to capture it by hooks and crooks. The snare they had made was 'stronger than a cord, which could not easily be broken, and finer than rope (Erdrich, 1991, p. 489). This indicates a well - formed and prepared natives' initiative to directly resist over the power. The natives took the revenge of extreme domination they had been facing for long in their own land from the immigrants. In such way, they could trap those brokers as a revenge of their brutal domination and exploitation over the Native American *Chipua* tribes.

Conclusion

There is an interface between power and resistance. One directly affects another. Resistance occurs because of the power domination done upon the marginalized people. It is also because the powerless want to gain the power, and for that they try to protest against the power holders and their domination in different ways. The forms of resistance are varied; sometimes it is indirect and hidden, and some other times it can be direct protest. It is determined by the power structure and the mass and ability of the oppressed. When the oppressed and powerless are organized, they try to resist the power publicly. It is understood as the direct protest. But, if the oppressed people are not organized and if they think they are weak, they show their resistance indirectly.

George Orwell's *Shooting an Elephant* and Louise Erdrich's *Snares* have different forms of resistance against the power domination. The first is the hatred and hidden forms of resistance of the local Burmese against the British colonial power domination during the time of colonization. The local Burmese couldn't easily protest against the power of the British colonizer who had all military and administrative power to rule. Their resistance is

implicit and indirect. But, the story, *Snares* represents a form public protest and revenge against the exploitation of immigrants upon the Native Americans. They developed strong determination, prepared the snare and trapped the immigrants at the end. They gained the energy and determined to revolt against the immigrant land brokers. It was possible from the young generation. Such resistance occurs when the oppressed are psychologically more confident to revolt against the oppressor, as in the story, *Snares*.

In conclusion, this article highlights the significant influence of gender and cultural identity in shaping acts of resistance against oppression. Through a comparative analysis of the two texts, it demonstrates that resistance is not merely a reactionary impulse, but rather a deeply rooted and almost inevitable response to the exercise of power. While the specific forms of resistance vary depending on historical context, geographical location, and prevailing social conditions, the drive to oppose domination remains consistent. Both texts reveal that individuals, even when constrained by limited resources or power, are still capable of opposing authority—whether through overt actions or more subtle, symbolic gestures. In essence, the study brings to light the persistent struggle between those in power and those who resist, especially within societies burdened by systemic inequality and the legacy of colonial rule.

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