

Habeas Corpus: How Paul Lynch's *Prophet Song* exposes that corporal existence is dependent upon a hegemonic social construct

William F. Dwyer III

Trondheim International School
Festningsgata 2, Trondheim, 7014, Norway
Email: william.dwyer@this.no

Abstract:

Habeas Corpus directly translates to showing of a body and is commonly accepted as a right to a trial; this article explores the subjective nature of what recognises a body worthy of trial within a social construct and how hegemonic influence can present or hide a body at will. The article uses the philosophical lens of Deleuze and Guattari, as their binary metaphor of “root versus rhizome” helps to define corporal subjectivity. The article is based on Paul Lynch’s novel *Prophet Song* as a way of explaining the philosophy, as the dystopian novel provides examples of the shifting definitions of bodies at the will of the state. Furthermore, Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* and Rob Nixon’s *Slow Violence* are compared on a cartesian grid to explain the way a body can shift between definition or ambiguity dependent on the way it is presented to the public. The conclusion is that corporeal definition is contingent on the hegemonic interpretation of what defines a body within a social construct.

Keywords: Paul Lynch, Deleuze and Guattari, Rhizome, Slow Violence, Imagined Communities,

“Cogito, ergo sum”

René Descartes

“It is up to the state to decide what it believes or
does not believe according to its needs”

Paul Lynch

Habeas Corpus as a standard for justice, first assumes that a recognised body in question is allowed to be presented publicly at a trial within the social construct of the hegemonic state. Habeas corpus is assumed as a foundational moral law that gives constituents a right to be seen as a subject within the law. The latin phrase meaning “that you have the body” is interpreted as one’s right to be allowed a trial before being removed from the construct, and is ultimately a subjective interpretation dependent on the hegemonic construct’s need of self-preservation and is not a universal right. A social construct possesses the ability to change one’s perception of what qualifies a body between various

states of definitive subjectivity and generic ether depending on the way that body is presented in media and the narrative attached to it. Long before the courtroom is entered, the language attached to a body can help or hinder one's right to a trial. Ultimately "habeas corpus", interpreted as "the right to a trial" is a construct's way of displaying a subject within a court appearance in order to classify it and support the schematic construct itself, but recognition or indifference of a subject's rights happens before the trial itself, as the body needs to be acknowledged as a participating subject before it is even allowed access to the judicial procedures, laws, and regulations the construct has put in place. Therefore, the right of "habeas corpus" is a more malleable term that extends beyond the court room itself into less defined borders dependent upon a hegemonic construct and the presentation of a body in media. Literary texts are the tool to this fluidity as they can expose a body with clear definition to a sympathetic public, or obscure a constituent behind hyperbolic rhetoric or bureaucratic mundanity. One can draw from a plethora of examples where human bodies within a construct were denied the perceived human right of habeas corpus through creative linguistic justifications and a surrounding media story. To expose the way that a defined body, or subject, within a social construct can behave as a floating signifier destabilised within a hegemonic construct, this paper uses the theoretical lens of Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari as a base to support its claim; as their extended binary metaphor of root versus rhizome helps to clarify the way a mind can shift seemingly static nouns into obscure clouds and confusion. The paper then clarifies their metaphor by adding a contemporary argument positioning Benedict Anderson's idea of "imagined communities" with Rob Nixon's idea of "slow violence" alongside one another to help explain the subjective nature of bodies in question. Finally, Paul Lynch's 2023 novel *Prophet Song* provides examples of the way literature acts as a catalyst to define a body within a social construct, or return it to its non-definitive ether, as the novel provides examples of both happening simultaneously for the reader. Ultimately a physical body within a social construct behaves like a floating signifier, or agreed essence detached from existence, and literary grounding enables attachment and recognition (habeas corpus) before the body in question is allowed to be publicly recognised in a court. Paul Lynch's novel *Prophet Song* reveals that the human right of habeas corpus is ultimately a subjective interpretation dependent on hegemonic control allowing the body to exist within a social construct, and furthermore, the novel exposes a hegemonic construct's ability to metamorphose its constituents into various classifications dependent on convenience and self-preservation.

This is my body, this is my blood

To first claim that an existing body can behave as a floating signifier detached from corporality, one can turn to the theoretical lens of Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and their extended metaphor of root versus rhizome. Deleuze and Guattari wrote *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) with the intention to destabilise perceived-rational thought and help the reader question definitive boundaries they have long believed as dogma within their social construct. The theorists wrote these two seminal books with an intentional lack of clarity so that the reader practices

projecting a definition on a text instead of a text classifying its reader. At times, this attempt at creative free-thinking can read like the two authors throwing a box of mixed metaphors down an academic staircase to a basement publisher, but the intention was commendable. Therefore, this paper does something that the two theorists would most likely resist, as it attempts to organise their thoughts and claims as a base on a cartesian grid (explained later). Within many of the overlapping metaphors, there is one constant in their writing; nothing is rationally static and all thought is constantly evolving and taking on new shapes dependent on perspective. It is a post-structuralist claim building off Nietzsche's existentialism and Derrida's linguistic interpretations in response to Lacan and Freudian psychoanalysis, but ultimately helps illustrate that bodies one can see in front of us can be interpreted in varying degrees of existence depending on the essence attached to the proper noun. To make a claim that a body does not exist when the physical form is before you is a paradox similar to "fake news" or "alternative facts"; however, whether or not this body exists to the extent that it is recognised as subject within a hegemonic social construct worthy of judicial empathy and allowed to defend itself at a trial is subject for debate. Many urban citizens could recognise a suspended disbelief or personal justification in their morning commute as they travel past constituents in need and outside the recognition of justice. A simple scroll through a TikTok feed will take the modern viewer past a stimulating menagerie of creative human rights abuses to bodies without trials or recognition regardless of UN regulations. Although these bodies physically exist, they behave like floating signifiers within a construct detached from essence requiring literary grounding to trigger our sympathetic engagement. Although the viewer may see the body, the body is not recognised and justice is not defended before a court. Deleuze and Guattari (D&G) loosely define the difference between essence and existence utilising the metaphor of a root versus a rhizome in their introductory chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus*; a root being a hegemonic-defined object and a rhizome being more of an ambiguous cloud open to creative interpretation beyond accepted norms. D&G make the claim that these perceived-definitive boundaries are psychologically instilled and merit the possibility of reversibility. D&G state, "A rhizome as subterranean stem is absolutely different from roots and radicals (...) Rhizome connects any point to any other point (...) The rhizome is an antigenealogy. It is a short-term memory or anti-memory," (D&G 1458). Taking this as a metaphor, the rhizome would be an object beyond confirmed definition but still within the cloud of existence. Being detached from definition it is also detached from the sympathy or morality of a hegemonic construct as one cannot define the "thing" in any ontological sense but can describe the cloud surrounding it. The opposite of a rhizome is a root, being something that is static within clearly defined borders, similar to a proper noun that is agreed upon. D&G state that this definitive rationality is dependent upon a larger hegemonic order as, "History is always written from the sedentary point of view and in the name of a unitary State apparatus," thus the classification of "roots" is a product of some kind of hegemonic social control (D&G 1460). For example, a homeless man could remain a generic rhizomatic body often ignored as an individual until an event, like a police conflict, has the public focus on him; at this point media could root him as an individual with rights by stating his name and

his story or, conversely, make him into a rhizome by grouping him with a cloud of language associated with him; immigrant, alcoholic, homeless, etc, permitting dismissal. However, one should not walk away from this theory thinking that the social order is static, as the ultimate claim here is that nothing remains defined in one category for long and everything is shifting depending on perspective. Objects and bodies, like symbols, are constantly fluctuating in and out of definition. For a contemporary example one could look at the definitions of gender and the way that it would shift depending on which corner of the planet one looks at defined genders or which historical context one finds oneself within; the classifications behave as roots or rhizomes depending on the conversation and the convenience of the hegemonic power structure in control. Defining these roles is something that a hegemonic order attempts to do through the law, but one should not delude oneself into thinking that this law has permanence or is grounded in some kind of universal morality. One can see this alchemy of bodily classifications in action during a trial, as the ceremony of the trial does nothing more than deliver labels to objects within the social construct; branding constituents into binary classifications such as “innocent vs. guilty” or “prosecution vs. defence” in order to draw temporary borders on floating signifiers. Seldom would a trial end with the sentencing of “the accused was a bit of both depending on the way you look at it” or the plaintiff “could see where the defendant was coming from” which is probably a more rational sentencing but would not support a confidence in the social order. If one was to follow the thought of D&G then everything would be in a state of fluctuation and metaphoric rhizomes or roots are only cloudy or definitive depending on the moment when they are ontologically studied. Surely the standard of deviance has changed in the last 50 years and what defines good and bad fluctuates with time, so then do bodies within a social construct. Then one can deduce that the purpose of a trial is more about the state performing itself into existence and limiting a constituent’s thinking into binary classifications set by a hegemonic construct justifying its monopolisation of violence under the guise of ethical-judicial permanence as all classifications could be argued into different categories depending on linguistic interpretation and deconstruction. D&G illustrate the ability to shift even the most seemingly concrete nouns from ambiguous (rhizome) to defined (root) by perceptual influence and thus one can see the state’s ability to define a body within its hegemonic control as existent and worthy of a trial or a floating signifier within an anonymous mass.

Setting D&G’s claim that bodies are not static and can fluctuate between ambiguous (rhizome) and concrete (root), we can turn to Benedict Anderson and Rob Nixon to provide insight into how this metamorphosis is done using literature. The formation of a body recognised by the hegemonic construct as worthy of display at a trial can be organised using a scale where the two authors’ central ideas of “Imagined Communities” and “Slow Violence” are on a cartesian grid with D&G’s metaphor as background. The x,y axis have a gradient scale of “rate of violence” and “imagined community” to illustrate the fluid nature of a body in question and how literature can aid the formation/ deformation of a body across this field.

<p>Body in fluctuation</p>	<p>+</p> <p>Body is shown (root) Habeas Corpus</p>
<p>Body is hidden (rhizome)</p>	<p>(X) Rate of violence (y) ability to imagine a community</p> <p>Body in fluctuation</p>

First, for a body to be recognised by a hegemonic construct, habeas corpus, it helps if it is attached to a community one can imagine and attach sympathy to. For example, atrocities of school shootings in suburban communities are much more likely to merit public sympathy in Western media compared to yet another civil war in a forgotten Central African nation due to the fact that the former social construct is easily imagined by the viewer. Despite the disproportionate number of victims, one tragedy will form names and personalities (roots) whereas the other will be left in a generic cloud often labeled “tribal warfare” (rhizome). In 1983 Benedict Anderson explained this recognition of cultures when he made the claim, “People don’t precede their cultures but are formed through culture,” (Anderson 112). It is a basic existential claim stating that the existence of nations do not precede the essence imagined by their constituents who need to continually remind and perform this community into existence. One can then see national parades, anthems, and sporting events not as just jovial celebrations, but performances of hegemonic self-preservation in an attempt to convince the collective public imagination of their social construct’s existence. If the performance is convincing enough, then the community can be imagined and sympathised with, but if the performance is absent then the community remains ambiguous. However, these positions should not be placed in binary opposition to one another, but placed on a gradient in order to remind the viewer that this is not a static definition, as reporting and literature can influence one’s ability to imagine a community. In Martha C. Nussbaum’s essay “Cultivating Humanity” she agrees with this concept when she states, “A major part of the social role of the literary artist (...) was to promote our sympathetic understanding of all outcast or oppressed people, by giving their strivings voice,” and in giving voice we begin to imagine the community (Nussbaum 2315). Nussbaum goes on, “To allow inside one’s mind people who seem alien and frightening is to show a capacity for openness and responsiveness that goes against the grain of many cultural stereotypes of self-sufficiency (...) to disturb us,” and it is this disturbance that moves the position of a body in question along the gradient axis (Nussbaum 2316). However, this perspective also means that a group of people remains beyond the

responsibility of law unless the performance of their community is convincing outside the hegemonic perspective, much to the Palestinian's frustration, and can be discredited by literature's dismissive ability to hide bodies behind objective labels. Anderson explains, "What matters is not the falsity\genuineness of a community but the style in which the nation is imagined," meaning that despite the honest intentions of a body to exist and be seen, it is up to the hegemonic order to accept the performance before this body is delivered justice (Anderson 111). If a hegemonic construct refuses to report or imagine a group of people into existence, then the bodies within the community are not fully formed and thus outside the right of habeas corpus. Literature and reporting can help a reader imagine a community and thus show the bodies within, but one should remember that the converse is also true as reporting also permits the dismissal of a community or ambiguous grouping of bodies behind labeled masses.

Despite the ability to imagine a community one can still find examples of casually turning constituents into collateral damage; to explain this indifference, one can use Rob Nixon's idea of "Slow Violence". Nixon presents the idea of slow violence as, "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all," and thus a violence that renders the defendants involved as not shown for judicial recourse due to the length of time they were violated (Nixon 2). For Nixon, the rate at which violence occurs correlates to the litigious reaction from the hegemonic construct in retributive justice. He explains, "different kinds of disaster possess unequal heft. Falling bodies, burning towers, exploding heads, avalanches, volcanoes, and tsunamis have a visceral, eye-catching and page-turning power that tales of slow violence, unfolding over years, decades, even centuries, cannot match," and thus if violence is too slow the sympathetic response will be more apt to be met with apathetic indifference or kafkaesque bureaucracy (Nixon 3). Connecting this to the larger claim, slow violence appeals to the metaphoric rhizome, where it is diffuse and hard to define and by contrast fast violence is noticed, defined, and begs for a response. Certainly the public bludgeoning of children would more easily define victim and perpetrator than the slow poisoning of children through cancer rates by dumping toxic tech products into their drinking water; one shows the bodies (roots) where the latter remains diffuse (rhizome). Optimistically, literature has the ability to speed up the perception of violence, as toxic cancer rates may take years to develop after said river is polluted, but a well written report may make the reader perceive this as breaking news that demands immediate attention. The rate at which violence happens does not necessarily correlate to the rate at which the mind perceives it thanks to its literary reporting. As Nixon explains, "In a world permeated by insidious, yet unseen or imperceptible violence, imaginative writing can help make the unapparent appear, making it accessible and tangible by humanising drawn-out threats inaccessible to the immediate senses. Writing can challenge perceptual habits that downplay the damage slow violence inflicts," (Nixon 15). Therefore, media and reporting have the ability to push an audience to recognition, or seeing the bodies. However, what Nixon neglects to point out is that, by contrast, media and literature can also slow the perception of violence by sedating the public with assurances

that the immediate danger “falling bodies and exploding heads” are on-going, chronic, and inevitable thus lulling the population to indifference. Even though one might be able to imagine a community and see the images of victims on a screen, the reporting of the story influences the rate at which violence is perceived; therefore, breaking news on rising ocean levels might be met with the same reaction as, yet another, missile landing in a public market in the Middle East. The rate at which violence is perceived correlates to an audience’s ability to see the bodies as worthy of habeas corpus.

Pulling these theoretical concepts together in conclusion, D&G claim that all bodies are in fluctuation on a perceptual binary plane of defined or diffuse and use the metaphor of roots versus rhizomes to help explain; Nixon and Anderson expose ways that literature can influence an audience’s perception of these bodies dependent on one’s ability to imagine the community and perceive the rate of violence. All of this together supports the claim that despite habeas corpus being a universal human right, the literature and reporting influences the hegemonic power structure’s ability to define or hide constituent’s bodies from the public. Therefore, literature and media have the ability to affect the fluidity of a body between quadrants if the state allows the freedom of the press by exposing awareness of a plight or increasing the rate at which the violence is perceived. Then the larger question comes to light of, who controls the publication and reception of literature and media reporting? Although one might put this monopoly of violence within the sovereignty of the state, this would discredit the independent publishers or casual conversations amongst the public; after all, only the most dictatorial of regimes have that kind of control over the publishing and censorship of media. Therefore, one must think more broadly of a hegemonic social construct, which is, of course, connected to state judicial institutions, as possessing the ability to define bodies before the public perception. Conclusively, habeas corpus is not a universal right, as the hegemonic social construct possesses ultimate sovereignty for its constituents as it controls whether or not a body exists to begin with.

Prophet Song

After establishing this theoretical claim, that bodies are non-definitive and recognition within a court and judicial trial first depends on one defining a body within a social construct, one can turn to *Prophet Song* to give examples of literature’s ability to move bodies across quadrants. Lynch gives examples of a state’s ability to affect the rate at which violence is perceived and hide individuals in diffuse groups rather than imagining the community. Lynch exposes that it is a hegemonic power that possesses the ability to allow a body to exist and merit justice within the perception of the public. *Prophet Song*, at face value, is a dystopian novel where a draconian state confines and tortures its constituents in creative ways for the reader’s cringing, only to be met with an unsatisfying ending absent of resolution. The book behaves like an open wound that demands attention but is frustratingly neglected. However, the narrative excels far beyond a mass-market fiction and has reached critical literary acclaim as the book speeds recognisable background violence in our lives, reflecting contemporary political states, while placing the plot within a community the first world

can imagine; thus the novel forces a reader to confront their indifference to related stories they have scrolled past and attach some unfortunate atrocities slightly closer to home. Ireland, being a community most can imagine in developed nations, is the appropriate setting for witnessing the slow devolution from free-democracy into draconian torture-state delivered in less than 250 pages; current readers may relate to residing around page 180 when they look at the media that currently surrounds them and thus are fated to read into the future of a potentiality. Much like other contemporary author's positing their novels as frustratingly impenetrable, Lynch rejects traditional grammar and punctuation, thus making this less of a subconscious holiday beach read and more of a self-induced lobotomy demanding focus throughout. However, this intentional choice forces the reader to maintain focus, and not skim through the power of a state social construct in its ability to disregard the bodies of its constituents. Specifically, the novel exposes the ability of a hegemonic community to make its constituents appear and disappear at will without judicial repercussion. Although a work of fiction, one is haunted by connections easily made to various institutions that litter a contemporary timeline. The novel exposes that habeas corpus is not a universal right, but subjective on the hegemonic state's tolerance of a body to exist within a community and willingness to expose it to the public.

Although the novel depicts a totalitarian regime where the public within is ultimately victimised, the book starts by presenting the state as an imagined community dependent on the population's ability to agree it into existence. Lynch is presenting the reader with the law and dogma of a state that is existential and fluid, thus showing that morality is not rooted but open to interpretation. Lynch shows that law does not exist beyond a social construct and the essence imagined above reality, thus all justice is subjective. Lynch presents the triviality of this existential political-state at the beginning of the novel in two places, first through the protagonist's (Eilish) dream and secondly through the comments of her senile father. Early on in the novel Eilish is visited in a dream by a government official. This man is brave enough to explicitly remove the veil of essence covering the existence beneath stating, "The rule of law. That is what I said. You speak about this word rights as though you understand the word rights, show me what rights were born with man, show me what tablet they are written on, where nature has decreed it is so (...) you believe in rights that do not exist, the rights you speak of cannot be verified, they are a fiction decreed by the state, it is up to the state to decide what it believes or does not believe according to its needs, surely you understand this," and thus Lynch positions law and justice upon a subjective shell of a social construct, not innate dogma with deontological roots (Lynch 60). Relating this to the idea of habeas corpus exposes that there is no natural right in existence to a trial or an exhibition of the body accused, but this is merely a privilege delivered when the social construct wills it. The frustration in the novel is that the reader is presented with the construct's triviality while following the protagonist through their inability to exit. There is only one character who begins to detach from this hegemonic power and that is Eilish's father, whose battle with dementia actually seems to empower him out of the hegemonic ties. While reading the newspaper, something her father calls "the big lie", her father looks up and makes the claim,

“tradition is nothing more than what everyone can agree on – the scientists, the teachers, the institutions, if you change ownership of the institutions then you can change ownership of the facts, you can alter the structure of belief, what is agreed upon, that is what they are doing, Eilish, it is really quite simple, the NAP is trying to change what you and I call reality, they want to muddy it like water, if you say one thing is another thing and you say it enough times, then it must be so, and if you keep saying it over and over people accept it as true – this is an old idea, of course, it really is nothing new, but you’re watching it happen in your own time and not in a book,” (Lynch 26). Lynch puts this second realisation early on in the novel to expose that there is no moral grounding beneath the laws or justice imposed by the state, but it is a shell of media that is wrapped around a lacuna of morality; thus what we perceive as a universal human right is nothing more than media attention. This revelation of baseless morality from a dementia victim is quickly dismissed as ramblings, but as Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari also point out similar sentiments of the father in their book *Anti-Oedipus*, “Man and nature are not like two opposite terms confronting each other (...) rather, they are one and the same essential reality, the producer-product,” and “Madness need not be all breakdown. It may also be breakthrough,” essentially defending her father saying the same thing; that the social construct of law and justice is held up by hegemony and it takes a bit of madness to see through the essence veiling the absence of existence (*Anti-Oedipus* 8, 131). The ideas are nothing new, as Foucault, Nietzsche, and Kirkegård all build off one another to show that the construct is positioned on a subjective base, but it does contradict some Enlightenment thinkers who believe that there is a universal truth at the bottom of the law we are directed towards. Lynch presenting the draconian state as hegemonic essence at the start of the novel frustrates the reader into seeing that everything is rhizomatic and nothing is rooted, thus all bodies are open to existential interpretation dependent on the hegemonic social construct’s ability to construct them or hide them through the use of media. As bodies begin to disappear or appear throughout the remainder of the novel the reader begins to understand the way that even the most corporal of beings become rhizomatic at the will of the hegemonic construct.

Imagination

Lynch shows the hegemonic construct’s ability to shift constituent’s bodies between defined classifications through the depiction of the father and the son in the novel, as both perceptually metamorphose between metaphoric roots and rhizomes throughout the course of the novel. Eilish’s husband, despite his minor appearance in the novel, haunts the plot through his absence after his trade union affiliation and open-demonstration clashed with the ideals of the state and led to his corporal disappearance. Eilish summarises her husband’s transient state when speaking with the official who came to her door stating, “My husband was arrested by the GNSB, she says, he was denied access to a solicitor and remains in detention without recourse to the courts, he is a trade unionist for the TUI and was just doing his job, we haven’t heard from him since he was taken, we were supposed to be going to Canada for our family holidays next week, it has been very difficult for

the children,” (Lynch 102). Eilish attempts to classify and define her husband as a body by using the various labels he was attached to within the construct. This is an attempt to draw lines around her husband with language and classify him within a definition and function so that the authorities can imagine him within the community as either a father, worker, union leader, or citizen. However, he is denied a trial as it is not in the state’s interest to show the body as a solid form but instead keep him ambiguous within a rhizomatic cloud. What Eilish attempts to do throughout the start of the novel is independently initiate habeas corpus to her fellow constituents in the hegemonic construct and define her husband’s body by continually attempting to get people to imagine him as a working part of the community. Unfortunately the power structures make it clear with their response to Eilish describing the law and who is corporeal enough to qualify as a body within it, “I’m afraid you are not alone, he says, but this is how things are now, and if I can speak between ourselves, it makes a right mockery of our oath,” this oath being the rights, like habeas corpus, many of us assume as universal but are now revealed as subjective dependent on hegemonic agreement (Lynch 102). The fate of the father exposes a construct’s ability to shift an individual from corporeal root to ambiguous rhizome in a group in spite of an illusion of a universality in human rights.

Where Eilish’s husband transitions from defined body to an ambiguous ether, her son does the opposite as the construct benefits from antagonising him into an enemy. After summarising the disappearance of her husband and attempting to form him into a body for the authorities, Eilish hesitates to name her son, Mark, for the opposite reason. Naming her son would move his body from the rhizomatic child to an adult body utilised in the mechanical functioning of a social construct as either forcing him into military service or antagonising him into an enemy. When Eilish refuses to define her son, the authority responds, “as regards your son, what my colleague here says is correct, it would be the case that if you were to come and make a sworn statement, the department would be informed and we can wash our hands of the matter, the file would remain closed until such a time as your son decides to re-enter the state, and sure who knows how things will turn out,” thus attempting to pressure her to define him within the established construct (Lynch 102). The body of her son is hidden under the veil of youth, but the novel reflects a reality where all bodies are shown and utilised by a construct when we begin to imagine them into functional roles. As the novel progresses, Eilish repeatedly refuses to contain the body of her son within a definition until the state takes it upon itself, publishing in the national paper stating, “page seven, there is nothing to read but a full-page advertisement from the state, the harp emblem at the top of the page, it is a public notice, a list of hundreds of names and addresses in small print of the people who absconded from military service. (...) she scans the list and reads her son’s name and address. She thinks of the sworn statement she made to the gardaí, she reads her son’s name again and sees in the black print the dark night to come, seeing how they have damned her son and how easy it was after all,” (Lynch 104). This is a direct example of media influencing the imagination of a community and committing habeas corpus by showing the body of her son in print, with a label that defines the role of traitor within the construct. This is an example of a trial, judgment, and verdict completed outside of the courtroom

residing solely within the media, thus proving that habeas corpus extends far beyond the Grecian columns and a jury of your peers and is an ongoing constant presence. The novel shows the transition of a father from a solid body into a generic imagination juxtaposed with a son, whose body is shown and displayed in the media. Therefore, Lynch uses the novel to show that habeas corpus is not a universal right bequeathed to all individuals, but a subjective privilege granted from the social construct when it is convenient.

Prophet Song illustrates the way bodies shift into various states of definition depending on the social construct at the hegemonic-helm and this revelation is carried by the reader beyond the book as well. Labels affixed upon once rhizomatic individuals allow for a collective imagination of the community and various roles within so that people can perform their hegemonic construct into existence. The application of this conceptual social status shift was proven beyond fiction in the psychological experiment by Stanley Milgrim entitled “Obedience to Authority: an Experimental View”. In the, now famous, experiment, labels were affixed to random participants within a performed social construct which ultimately led to average participants willingly torturing one another with a socially constructed deontological moral focus thinking they were fulfilling their hegemonic role. Participants were given the defined labels of “teachers” and “students” and were told that the experiment would study punishment’s connection with learning. Teachers were instructed to give an electric shock to students for wrong answers and the students, actors with pre-taped sounds of painful agony, responded accordingly when shocks were administered. The psychological test was all a ruse, but gave disturbing results. The simulation moved average people from rhizomes to roots by affixing labels and giving them a function so that they could imagine themselves within a useful community with a socially constructed moral purpose. Although the whole thing was a setup, the participants, average males from the suburban Connecticut area now dressed in their neat “teacher” label, believed they were shocking a student with increasing voltage past a point of danger in order to fulfil an arbitrary definition that had recently been affixed to them by a social construct. The experiment behaves much like a trial affixing labels of plaintiff and defendant and going through performative roles to build a social construct into existence. Ultimately, the experiment wound up concluding, “people obey either out of fear or out of desire to appear cooperative -- even when acting against their own better judgment and desires,” to the point where 65% percent of participants went to the point of thinking they were willingly killing the student despite having their role constructed as “teacher” only a short time before (Milgrim). Milgrim showed that anyone defined by a social construct will go to dastardly ends in order to fulfil their role to uphold the preservation of the imagined community, thus revealing a participant’s corporeal malleability. However, one should not blame the participants in the experiment for their deeds, but begin to look at the social construct surrounding the individual and its will to preserve its monopoly of violence. This experiment correlates to what Lynch shows in his novel, as the subjects within the narrative lose their personal sovereignty when affixed with a label and become objects operating in a construct and their bodies are either recognised or disregarded dependent on the preservation of the construct at the helm. Much like arbitrary labels

of IRA or Unionist, bodies are ambiguous until they are defined and classified under labels like, traitor, terrorist, Catholic, Protestant, but before judgment is rendered one must realise that all of the labels reside within, and are delivered by, the larger hegemonic social construct. When a body is presented it is at the will of the construct, which then affixes a label to the body to classify its constituents, and the constituents will dutifully fulfil their role in preserving the overall hegemonic construct by punishing one another accordingly.

Violence

The rate at which violence is perceived correlates to the empathetic recognition of a body within a community; as stated in the introduction, the faster the violence the more likely a community will respond to the plight of the victim. This is a claim that might seem drastic at first, but for the sake of the argument one should attempt to have some plasticity around the floating signifier of “violence” and see it more as a constant white noise in a community that helps define perceptual moral borders through threat. One should acknowledge that there is a constant threat of violence that is tolerated within a community and helps keep the hegemonic order functioning. Certainly people will not go to *Lord of the Flies* when the police aren’t looking, but having accountability certainly keeps some subconscious actions repressed. This elasticity of the definition is not a new concept as philosopher Slavoj Žižek carried the idea of an extended definition of violence across a book carrying the title *Violence* (2007) and Michel Foucault comments extensively about how violence relates to control in society in *Discipline and Punish, the birth of the prison* (1977). One could even recall Max Weber and his, misquoted, monopoly of violence being tantamount to the hegemonic power’s sovereignty at the helm of governance (Weber). Regardless, it would be difficult to argue that a violent threat does not correlate to an element of judicial control and thus relates to the definition of bodies in habeas corpus.

Philosophers have organised the classifications of violent control on a society into different categories and here we can examine the way that perceptual time could affect these categories; Lynch presents versions of violence happening in his novel and relates them to how they help define their constituents within a social construct. Michel Foucault in his book *Discipline and Punish, the birth of the prison* (1977) waxes nostalgic for a punishment society over a discipline society as it was clear where the boundaries were and almost less sinister when public flogging and beheadings were an acknowledged spectacle (Foucault). Many would agree that an evolution towards a more vague omnipresent society of discipline has occurred where the threat of being watched and white noise of violence has replaced the public spectacle, yet still it holds a similar power authority despite the lack of a clear physical enclosure. Giles Deleuze takes this evolution of violent threat a step further in his “Postscript on Societies of Control” explaining that there is an exclusion to information that is similar to a “violent neglect” of its constituents as they are removed from access to the construct. Deleuze explains, “Foucault located the disciplinary societies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; they reach their height at the outset of the twentieth. They initiate the organisation of vast spaces of

enclosure,” and applying this to habeas corpus we can see that these enclosures are not only physical spaces, but linguistic enclosure defining a body within a label so that it can be seen to the constituents of an construct (Deleuze, Postscript 1). Deleuze makes the false claim that, “societies of control, which are in the process of replacing disciplinary societies,” (Deleuze, Postscript 4). This lays out the three states; punishment, discipline, and control as evolutionary steps of oppression acting upon a body within a social construct. The first being clear and physical and the latter being ambiguous and more hegemonic/psychological. Although these ideas separate physical enclosure, public violence, and some conspiratorial code that is neglecting its constituents through exclusion, the reality is that all of these societies are existing in front of us simultaneously and have never been neatly separated; this is what Lynch exposes in his novel. As anyone currently in solitary confinement after their daily waterboarding in Guantanamo Bay will probably tell you, there is a judicial code that they don’t have access to and their punishment remains physical and very much enclosed. There is no such thing as separating evolving states of violent punitive society as we are living in all of them simultaneously depending on perspective, but one should see that the rate of violence is more correlative to what helps define borders. The truth is that the hegemonic social construct can move a body through various states of control depending on its convenience by using language to either hide the body in an ether of bureaucracy or show the body within the confines of a linguistic label through clear public punishment within a media spectacle.

Lynch accounts for this changing of the body from clearly defined corporeal constituent to bureaucratic ether in *Prophet Song* through the slow violence of neglect that enables the dismissal of habeas corpus. For example, throughout the novel Eilish is continually trying to get her passport renewed so that she could leave the country but is constantly met with another form or never-ending cue that keeps her from being recognised as a physical citizen despite being corporeally present within the community. This would defend Deleuze’s claim that there is a code that she does not have access to that is keeping her body hidden and thus violently neglected, slowly, by the hegemonic construct as this eventually leads to her being dismissed from more physical sustenance. For example, when Eilish walks into the deli market she is ignored by a long-time friend and when she calls this to his attention stating, “Don’t leave me standing here now, Paddy, I haven’t got all day,” she is met with a powerless invisibility as Lynch describes, “From the cold room she hears the sound of a heavy box being dragged and dropped to the ground. An ample woman steps breathless into the shop and stands with bulging hands watching Paddy Pidgeon as he steps through the strip with a flourish of his arm. He slides his gaze past Eilish to meet the other woman with a smile. Mags, he says, I’m just about to close up, quickly now, what can I get you?” (Lynch 130). The ignoring of Eilish symbolically shows that although her body may be physically present, the right of habeas corpus is not granted due to the hegemonic construct’s prejudice and refusal of allowing her body to be seen. It is a trial before the trial. Although this is not an immediate violent act perpetrated by a shop owner, it is a slow starvation that will likely go unpunished; therefore the slow rate of violence inflicted on Eilish keeps her corporeal body hidden from judicial response. Eventually Lynch shows her devolution into

obscure anonymity at the end of the novel when he describes Eilish as, “she is no longer a person but a thing, this is what she thinks, a thing climbing into the truck with a child in her arms,” and this transformation from subject to object places her on a raft with a cacophony of nameless objects set to sea in international waters where it would be hard to argue against the violent neglect despite the slow arrival at the conclusion (Lynch 236). Therefore, Lynch exposes habeas corpus not as universal right to all citizens, but dependent on societal recognition and easily lulled into submission through negligent reporting extending the perceptive rate of the violence inflicted on the victim.

As the reader is forced to witness the slow violence of erasing Eilish, the reader juxtaposes this with the fast violent end of her son at the disciplinary hands of the state which shocks the reader into wanting justice. Eilish’s young son is detained, tortured, and eventually killed near the conclusion of the novel, something that happens as a surprise after he enters the hospital for care. When Eilish attempts to find her son she is sent to the morgue where the officer in charge explains, “down here, there are no names, just numbers I’m afraid, we do not have names for them when they come in, if your son is here he will be here as a number, you will need to make the identification yourself,” (Lynch 217). The officer performs the objectification of a body beyond habeas corpus into an undefined enemy and thus is able to treat her son not as a human with rights but as a means to an end. As Eilish goes through the catalog of human remains she continually states, “this is not my son, this is not my son, this is not my son, this is not my son, and she looks to the keeper who is looking at the time on his wrist and she unzips another body bag saying, this is not my son before she has even taken read of the face, this is not my son, this is not my son, this is not my son, this is not my son,” Lynch uses the repetition to shock the reader into witnessing undefined bodies stacking up beyond recognition (Lynch 218). Although a work of fiction, like many parts of the novel, they recall images we see in our daily news feed of victims who are “not our sons” but belong to someone. Eventually Eilish finds her child and the evidence of, “skin before her clouded with bruising, the missing and broken teeth (...) the nails torn from his hands and feet, seeing the bore of a drill through the front of his knee, the cigarette burns along the torso,” (Lynch 218). The guard then adds some cruel irony stating, “just so you know, Mrs Stack, it says here your son died of heart failure,” as surely everyone will eventually die of heart failure, but the drill bit through a minor’s kneecap remains unaccounted for. It is after this witnessing that Eilish takes action to leave the country, and it is at this point that the reader is shocked as well. Despite the violence happening faster than neglect, the objectification keeps the body unaccounted for; regardless, the evidence of torture to a minor on the reader is certainly more provocative than being ignored at a deli. Lynch’s novel illustrates that the rate at which violence is perceived provokes a different reaction to the reader, where one was left frustrated at the slow bureaucracy with Eilish, one is shocked and demanding justice for her son despite both being tortured and suffocated by an indifferent hegemonic construct.

Conclusion

Paul Lynch’s novel *Prophet Song* is a work of fiction, but it reflects a recognisable narrative

from our newsfeeds and is placed in a community we can imagine within various perceptual rates of violence. Lynch illustrates the ability of a hegemonic construct to transform bodies between various definitions of existence, thus allowing its self-preservation while simultaneously exposing a void of unalienable human rights beneath. Habeas corpus is acknowledged as a human right to a trial; this article, along with *Prophet Song* exposes that this trial and recognition of a body happens long before a subject enters a courtroom. Deleuze and Guattari help to define the fluidity of a body between subject and object through the metaphor of rhizomes and roots and one sees examples of subjects in the novel, from a mother's perspective, being transformed and numbered as tortured objects or recognised constituents. Of course, all bodies exist on earth in physical form but for them to be shown and accounted for within the justice of the law is something else and judgement happens long before a trial; for this the imagined community, or hegemonic construct, needs to be clearly defined and excepted or the violence needs to be quick enough for outside observers to register an emotional response. Although one would like to think that their community is grounded on universal moral rights for all citizens, Lynch reminds us that this is easily dismissed. Habeas corpus is not a right given to all, but dependent on hegemonic agreement, as Lynch displays by attaching our protagonists to the nameless people who are trapped in an endless state of bureaucratic purgatory. Lynch chooses to conclude the novel with the protagonists fleeing Ireland as refugees on rafts, as this is a path current nameless bodies are participating in at the time of publication and one can connect schematic images to it and thus begin to empathise with the bodies many have scrolled past. Therefore, *Prophet Song* is promoting habeas corpus to these victims in that it forces the reader to see the bodies with new recognition. Novels have the ability to speed the rate of perceived violence while simultaneously allowing the reader to imagine a community they have not connected with and in so doing novels can be the catalyst of justice. Of course, corporeal bodies exist within an ontological perspective, it is the media that helps position these bodies within a hegemonic framework deemed worthy of justice and a trial. Although Lynch has written a fictional account, one only need to do a quick internet search of a name like "Ghalib Kurdi" and "Alan Kurdi" to relate non-fiction examples of the fluctuating nature of habeas corpus and the essentiality of media reporting.

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