

STRATEGIZING VIOLENCE IN KARACHI: AN ANARCHIST PERSPECTIVE OF *THE PRISONER* BY OMAR SHAHID HAMID

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Abstract

The present study explores the ongoing conflict between state power and non-state actors as presented in Omar Hamid's novel The Prisoner published in 2013. It employs Bakunin's anarchist perspective derived from Statism and Anarchy and God and the State published in 1873 and 1882 respectively to analyze how characters resist the coercive mechanisms of state authority. From an anarchist perspective, the analysis focuses on the interplay between organized institutions and non-state actors, revealing the inherent violence used to sustain power. Through the defiance of the key character's refusal to comply with unethical directives, the text exposes the moral corruption and clash of state organs with each other embedded in the state's machinery. Additionally, this study argues that the violent confrontations between state agents and militant groups blur the line between legitimate and illegitimate use of force, thereby revealing the cyclical nature of institutional repression. The findings of the study reveal how both state and non-state entities employ violence to assert dominance, ultimately undermining the state's moral authority. The study further reveals how The Prisoner serves as a powerful commentary on the ethical ambiguities and destructive consequences of institutionalized power in contemporary socio-political context centering around Karachi.

Keywords: Institutional violence, Resistance, Bakunin's Anarchist perspective, State authority, *The Prisoner*

1. Introduction

Violence in Karachi is not merely an outburst of random aggression. It is a deeply entrenched and meticulously strategized instrument of power that has shaped the city's history for decades. Long before the events of 9/11, Karachi was a battleground where political parties, ethnic groups, and criminal organizations clashed in a relentless struggle for control. The 1980s and 1990s were particularly tumultuous with political rivalries between factions such as the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) and other ethnic groups leading to widespread violence. The intervention of the Rangers under Nawaz Sharif's government in the 1990s was a response to the escalating lawlessness that threatened to destabilize the city. This era saw the rise of militant wings associated with political parties, who wielded violence as a strategic tool to assert dominance, secure territories, and suppress opposition. The post-9/11 period did intensify these pre-existing tensions, but it is essential to recognize that Karachi's violent landscape is the result of a confluence of factors, including deep-rooted ethnic divisions, political power struggles, socio-economic disparities, and the pervasive influence of organized crime. These elements collectively contribute to a form of violence that is both physical and structural, deeply embedded in the social fabric of the city.

Anarchy, as theorized by Bakunin in *Statism and Anarchy* (1873/1990), is the absence of a legitimate and recognized central authority, leading to a state of lawlessness and chaos where various actors vie for control. It is marked by the breakdown of societal norms, the erosion of state structures, and the rise of non-state entities that challenge state power through coercive means. In such a scenario, violence becomes not just a means to achieve power but a mode of survival and assertion. Without a legitimate central power to regulate conflicts,

different factions resort to violent confrontations to impose their will. This cyclical and chaotic nature of anarchy disrupts the social fabric, generating fear, instability, and distrust among citizens.

In *The Prisoner*, Hamid maps out the consequences of this anarchic breakdown within Karachi's urban context, particularly in the aftermath of 9/11. As Pakistan becomes entrenched in the global war on terror, Karachi transforms into a battleground where political parties, law enforcement agencies, and non-state militant actors use violence to establish their own form of authority. The novel highlights the corrupt entanglements between these groups, where the distinction between state-sanctioned violence and criminal activity is blurred. Hamid's portrayal underscores how the anarchic atmosphere of Karachi creates a perpetual state of fear, making violence a common, almost normalized means of resolving conflicts and maintaining power—thus destabilizing the state's legitimacy and amplifying social divisions.

The novel portrays how formal power, wielded by state institutions like the police and military, intersects with informal power structures rooted in religion, caste, and social hierarchy. These power structures are deeply embedded in Karachi's social fabric, shaping the behavior of individuals and groups alike. Through the experiences of its protagonist, Superintendent D'Souza, the novel reveals the challenges of navigating a city where power is exercised through both overt violence and subtle coercion. Despite the rich political and social commentary in *The Prisoner*, there remains a significant gap in the scholarly analysis of the novel, particularly in understanding its broader implications for the study related to power dynamics in post-9/11 Pakistan. Existing literature on the period tends to focus on geopolitical ramifications or the direct impacts of terrorism on state policy and security. However, there has been limited exploration of how these issues are represented in fiction, particularly in the context of Karachi's complex sociopolitical landscape.

This study addresses this gap by providing a detailed examination of how *The Prisoner* reflects and critiques the cyclical relationship between state power and violence in Karachi. The novel's portrayal of the interplay between formal and informal power structures offers a unique perspective on the mechanisms of control and repression in the city. This analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of the novel and its significance within the broader discourse on violence, governance, and social justice in Pakistan. The relevance of this study extends beyond literary analysis, touching on broader contemporary issues related to state power, violence, and social justice. In a global context where the distinction between state authority and criminal enterprise is increasingly blurred, and where state violence is often justified in the name of security, the issues explored in *The Prisoner* are strikingly pertinent.

The novel provides a lens to examine the mechanisms of control and repression that are not only present in Karachi but are also evident in many parts of the world. Moreover, the study offers valuable insights into how formal and informal power structures operate and interact. The novel illustrates how these two forms of power converge in Karachi, creating a situation where violence becomes normalized and deeply embedded in the social fabric. By exploring these dynamics, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities of state control and the potential for resistance in contemporary society. By addressing the gap in the existing literature and providing a fresh interpretation of the novel, this research enhances our understanding of the intricate power structures at play in Karachi and their broader implications for governance and social justice.

1.1 Objectives of the study

- To explore the aspects of ideology leading towards violence and chaos in *The Prisoner*
- To find out the elements of protest and resistance against institutional authority

1.2 Research Questions

- How does Hamid map out the dynamics of violence in *The Prisoner*?
- How do Hamid's characters in *The Prisoner* protest against institutional authority, revealing inherent power disparities?

2. Literature review

Many emerging Pakistani writers are choosing to write fiction in English language, as it is widely circulated in the international market for global readership. The reading culture in Pakistan is weak (Ahmad, 1987), so many contemporary writers prefer to write in English and focus on themes that appeal to a Western audience. A prevalent theme in Pakistani fiction written in English is violence and anarchy. Due to the country's history and various socio-political and cultural factors, these ideas have become almost inseparable from Pakistani Anglophone literature (Saleem, 2017). Ahmad (1987) suggests that the persistent presence of identity and violence in Pakistani Anglophone fictional narratives is due to the country's ongoing internal cultural conflicts.

Egbert (1967) in his book *Socialism and American Art in the Light of European Utopianism, Marxism, and Anarchism* is of the view that the first modern anarchist is Godwin, who was a proponent of the French Revolution. Godwin (1793) believed that if the government failed to protect the people's basic rights, individuals should have the freedom to act as they choose. His book *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, supported and articulated the modern anarchist concept. Thoreau's (1849) concept of individualism and civil disobedience, which influenced American interpretations of anarchism, is particularly captured in his essay *Civil Disobedience* published in 1849. Thoreau's (1854) memoir *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* expressed his desire for one day of labour and six days of rest, during which individuals could explore culture, tradition, and their leisure activities. In the present world, anarchist theories are often found in science fiction and related genres.

Khan (2017) investigates the controversies that violence in Karachi entails and brings into conversation in this book some prominent academics, ethnographers, journalists, writers, and activists. This diverse coalition provokes shifts away from recursive academic and media scripts of the city toward a different 'counter-public' of cultural and political commentary, as contributors critically unpack the constitutive relation of violence to personal experience and create new understandings that are tentatively shared. The book draws a grimmer picture of violence that is textured locally and citywide. While each chapter provides fresh insights, the collective ethics of rewriting, rethinking, or cajoling Karachi's landscape into other forms is more dynamic and unclear, and being worked out in public. Different chapters by different contributors comprise a singular and important argument for those still spirited to understand what went wrong with Karachi.

Verkaaik (2016) contends that urban Sindh has frequently been plagued by ethnic violence since the mid-1980s, with the Muhajir Qaumi Movement (now known as the Muttahida Qaumi Movement) playing a pivotal role in these conflicts. Many analyses interpret this violence as a deepening of pre-existing communal differences among various migrant groups in cities such as Karachi and Hyderabad. However, this study argues that violence has often actively shaped ethnic identity and mobilization. By tracing the background of ethnic discourse in Pakistani politics since Independence, Verkaaik (2016) examines how ethnic identity politics and violence have frequently intersected, originating with student activism in the late 1970s and escalating into full-scale ethnic conflict during the 1980s and 1990s. This perspective moves beyond viewing ethnic identity as inherently communal or primordial, instead analyzing it as a product of political mobilization.

Yusuf (2008) examines the relationship between violence and urbanity. Using Karachi, Pakistan, as a case study, it asks how violent cities are imagined and experienced by their residents. The thesis draws on a variety of theoretical and epistemological frameworks

from urban studies to analyze the social and historical processes of urbanization that have led to the perception of Karachi as a city of violence. It then uses the distinction that Michel de Certeau draws between strategy and tactic in his seminal work *The Practice of Everyday Life* to analyze how Karachiites inhabit, imagine, and invent their city in the midst of in defiance of - ongoing urban violence. Using de Certeau's argument to contextualize ethnographic research, media analysis, and personal narrative, this thesis argues that the everyday practices of Karachiites such as remembering, driving, and blogging are 'tactics' aimed at creating representational spaces that are symbolically free of violence.

Ahmed (2022) examines violence and necro-political experiences in the management of life and death in Pakistan's largest city, Karachi, as represented by Hamid in his debut novel *The Prisoner* (2013). Pakistan's western border and its largest city, Karachi, have long been epicenters of violence in the context of wars, such as the Soviet-Afghan conflict and the War on Terror in neighboring Afghanistan. The study analyzes the relationship between governing authorities and violence in necropolitical spaces through critical frameworks established by Mbembe (2001) and Agamben (2005). Using a fictional narrative analysis, the researcher examines local and global strategies of occupation, domination, and subjugation that seek to control human bodies via social, economic, political, and religious discourses. The study argues that violence and death serve as tools of control over human bodies in the novel, where some lives are rendered disposable, reduced to bare life by both state and non-state actors. Within this framework, the researcher highlights how, in Karachi's political landscape, certain lives are valued more than others. Additionally, the study suggests that the setting in *The Prisoner* (2013) exemplifies what Agamben (2005) termed the state of exception, where certain individuals are deemed unworthy of life and are, consequently, marginalized or removed.

3. Theoretical framework

This study employs a theoretical framework rooted in anarchist theory, specifically drawing on the works of Mikhail Bakunin. Bakunin's anarchist theory, as articulated in *God and the State* (1882/1970) and *Statism and Anarchy* (1873/1990) serves as the primary framework for this study. Through this framework, the research aims to analyze how state institutions in Pakistan, as depicted in *The Prisoner* by Hamid, utilize violence and repression to maintain control and dominance.

In this study, Bakunin's theory of anarchy is central to the analysis. Bakunin (1873/1990) portrays the state as a wild beast with immense power, using violence and repression to subjugate its citizens. He argues that state authorities, driven by the desire for dominance, employ oppression to achieve and maintain control. "The State is a vast slaughterhouse, an institution of organized violence, and its only means of perpetuating itself is through the systematic application of force" (p. 12). Bakunin (1882/1970) advocates for a strategy of widespread and passionate destruction against the state as a necessary means to challenge this political violence. "The passion for destruction is also a creative passion; it is a rebellion against the fetters of authority, an essential act to sweep away the old and give birth to the new" (p. 15).

Bakunin (1882/1970) critiques all forms of authority, viewing them as inherently dictatorial and contrary to human nature. He posits that the state, as the highest form of hierarchical power, stifles individual freedom and creativity, thereby hindering social progress. Bakunin argues that humanity's evolution is a dialectical process, marked by the negation of animosity to achieve a higher state of being. This process, according to him, is driven by the dual forces of rebellion and contemplation, which are essential for social change. The researcher explores these anarchist ideas to understand the motivations behind the actions of non-state actors in *The Prisoner*. The analysis focuses on Bakunin's assertion

that the state, with its repressive institutions, is the primary obstacle to social development. His critique of the state as a manipulative entity, that exploits its subjects through both physical and ideological means, is applied to examine the novel's portrayal of state power.

The study applies Bakunin's anarchist perspective to explore how non-state actors resist state authority through violent means. By examining the novel's depiction of these dynamics, the study investigates whether such anarchist-inspired violence can be seen as a justified response to state oppression or if it further complicates the socio-political landscape. The analysis critically considers the paradox of employing violence against the state, a strategy Bakunin endorses but which also carries inherent risks to social stability. The focus of this research is on the use of repressive state apparatuses, particularly the role of the police in perpetuating violence and crime within Pakistani society as depicted in the novel. The study examines how the state utilizes these repressive institutions to counter threats from non-state actors, aiming to restore stability through strategic violence. This theoretical lens allows for a nuanced exploration of how state repression and violence are portrayed in *The Prisoner*.

The study examines how the characters in the novel embody Bakunin's notion of the state as an exploitative force, particularly in their interactions with state institutions. The analysis extends to the democratic facade of the state in Pakistan, as portrayed in the novel, and explores how Bakunin's critique of pseudo-constitutionalism is reflected in the narrative. Finally, the study considers Bakunin's assertion that the masses, though seemingly docile, are coerced into submission by the state's repressive apparatuses. The focus is primarily on the police, as emphasized in the text to analyze how these institutions enforce state control through violence and surveillance. Bakunin's theory of revolutionary violence, as a creative and affirmative passion for democratic order, is applied to assess the acts of resistance depicted in the novel, exploring their implications for the socio-political environment.

4. Textual Analysis

The Prisoner presents Pakistani society as plagued by terrorism and bloodshed, focusing on the violent clashes between non-state chaotic actors (terrorism) and state institutions. It highlights the use of severe measures by the state to prevent political violent threats in society. The state, described as a hegemonic apparatus employs violence through its subordinate apparatuses to govern its inhabitants and subjugate oppositional ethnic, religious, and ideological groups. The novel portrays the Pakistani state as a machine that uses force to eliminate social and political divisions in society through a series of institutions. The state uses its citizenry to carry out repressive operations against rebellious bodies in these institutions. Anarchism questions the state's right to exercise authority over its subjects, declaring it "false, arbitrary, and fatal," (Bakunin, 1882/1970, p. 34). As a result, the legitimacy of the state's reduction of its citizens' position to that of its agents is utterly dismissed by anarchists.

Hamid (2013) demonstrates how the Pakistani state uses its population to sustain its political ambitions by using violence against fellow citizens. The text emphasizes the terrorism and instability generated by non-state actors, which provoke punitive state aggression. The text prompts us to consider the necessity of government aggression to maintain social harmony in Pakistani society, as well as the resulting consequences. The narrative of the text depicts the complex workings of the state apparatus through the viewpoint of Constantine, a police officer. This character's perspective is significant because it provides the nation's stance on the use of violence against political protests. It also enables us to consider the role of violence as a state tactic for dealing with circumstances of instability and anarchy in society

4.1 Mapping the Dynamics of Violence

The author has explicitly mapped out the dynamics of violence in his novel. “It is a matter of national importance, and the nation’s honor is at stake” (Hamid, 2013, p. 20). The line from the text reflects how state institutions justify their actions under the guise of national pride and security. These are the rhetorical devices that are used by the state and its agents who are involved in committing violence beyond the orbit of law. The phrases like *nation’s honor* and *security*, invoke the patriotism of the common citizenry aligning their loyalty with state interests. By this, state frames its actions, legitimizes the violence, and positions itself as the protector of national dignity. Phrases like this not only create emotional appeal and legalize state-driven violence but also give moral cover to violence. When a state claims that a nation’s honor is at stake, it justifies even extra-legal actions. This sort of framing of actions is usually used to suppress opposition and silence criticism. Bakunin (1882/1970) argues that invoking “honor” is part of the state’s illusion of moral authority. In Bakunin’s (1882/1970) view, the state uses ideology, including concepts like national honor, to control the masses. Through Bakunin’s lens this statement can be seen as an ideological tool, masking the state’s inherent repression and violence behind a façade of patriotism and moral righteousness. It highlights how state authority manipulates honor and nationalism to maintain control and suppress dissent while creating conditions that, according to Bakunin, could eventually lead to resistance or rebellion.

The author speaks of the power dynamics within the context of the novel and shows state institutions and their agents operate outside the official structures. This suggests the existence of a parallel actor that rules through force and violence not via legitimacy and democratic norms. “In reality, they created a parallel government where they had the power of taxation, dispute resolution, punishment, and even life and death, over the citizens of the city” (Hamid, 2013, p. 29). The parallel government exerts complete authority over its residents by using force as its primary tool. This informal or alternative authority structure in the novel mirrors the state in its use of violence to maintain order, showing that the methods of oppression are the same whether they come from the official state or a parallel system. The parallel government’s use of force suggests that residents under its rule experience a different face of the same oppression, whether under the state or an informal system. This implies that the state’s failure does not lead to liberation but rather to the emergence of other oppressive systems. Bakunin’s (1873/1990) anarchist view offers a sharp critique of hierarchical authority structures like the parallel government. He argues that such systems, despite appearing to be alternatives to the state, are no better because they continue to uphold the same principles of coercion and domination. The true path to freedom, according to Bakunin, lies in dismantling all forms of hierarchical authority, including both the official state and its parallel counterparts. Bakunin believes that authority—regardless of its source—is inherently oppressive.

In the context of the novel, the reader realizes the unchecked power and coercion, state institutions enjoy when the author says, “No one challenged the authority of the police” (Hamid, 2013, p.29). This underscores a significant point of unchecked power and coercion, closely aligned with Bakunin’s (1882/1970) view as presented in *God and the State* as an instrument of repression. This phrase reveals the extent to which the police, as an embodiment of state authority, operate without resistance or opposition. The lack of challenge reflects a society that has internalized fear and submission to such an extent that questioning the legitimacy of the police is no longer an option. According to Bakunin, the police are one of the primary tools the state uses to maintain control and enforce its authority. He viewed the state as a repressive apparatus, and its reliance on institutions like the police

illustrates its fundamental need for coercion to preserve power. In this context, the police act not only as enforcers of the law but also as agents of the state's overarching desire to dominate and suppress.

Bakunin's critique extends to the nature of obedience in such a society, where individuals are conditioned to accept authority without question. The unquestioned authority of the police reflects this dynamic, where the populace is subdued, not just through direct violence, but also through an ingrained acceptance of state power. The police, acting as enforcers of the state's will, use this fear and the threat of force to ensure compliance. Bakunin argued that the state's control over society, particularly through its repressive institutions, stifles individual freedom and prevents the development of a truly liberated society.

Furthermore, Bakunin's theory emphasizes that this kind of passive acceptance is the very mechanism through which the state maintains its power. The absence of resistance suggests that people have been conditioned into submission, making rebellion futile. Bakunin, however, advocated for rebellion as a creative and necessary force for social change, arguing that the state's authority should be dismantled through acts of defiance. In the context of the novel, the police's unchecked power symbolizes the broader problem of state repression, which Bakunin believed could only be overcome by rejecting the legitimacy of the state and its institutions. This portrayal highlights the dangers of a society where no one challenges the authority of repressive forces like the police, underscoring the need for active resistance to achieve true freedom.

The State and its agents harbor unbridled power and authority to use violence, this leads to a deeply entrenched relationship between the state and criminal enterprises. It is evident in the quote from the text where Naika (Brothel owner/manager) visits the police station. "When she comes to the station to negotiate the monthly rate for the brothels" (Hamid, 2013, p.31). The police station's involvement in determining the brothel's monthly charges highlights the deep corruption within state institutions. Instead of enforcing the law, the police benefit financially from illegal activities, aligning with Bakunin's critique of the state as inherently oppressive and exploitative. Bakunin (1873/1990) argues that state institutions, including the police, serve the interests of the ruling class rather than the public, often abusing power for personal gain. This relationship between the police and the brothel reflects a corrupt system where law enforcement operates with impunity, exploiting vulnerable populations for profit. Rather than dismantling the brothel, the police regulate and profit from it, revealing the state's role as an instrument of coercion and corruption. This supports Bakunin's view that the state perpetuates itself through violence and exploitation, justifying his call for the dismantling of such oppressive structures.

In states where police and other law enforcement agencies are mere tools in the hands of rulers to prolong their rules, the loyalty of these institutions is not for the citizens or to protect the life and property of the masses but to give protection to their handlers to any extent. The following quote from the novel is quite evidence of this harsh reality. "Our duty is to obey the ruling party, not the law" (Hamid, 2013, p.32), underscores the subjugation of legal principles to political authority, illustrating the state's manipulation of its institutions to maintain control. This reflects a situation where the loyalty of state institutions, such as the police or military, is not to the law or the citizens they are meant to protect, but rather to the ruling elite or political powers in place. From an anarchist perspective, particularly through Bakunin's (1873/1990) lens, this line reinforces the idea that the state uses its apparatus not to uphold justice or equality, but to perpetuate its own power. Bakunin argued that the state and its institutions are inherently repressive, and this quote exemplifies how the state distorts the

concept of duty, redirecting it away from public service or lawful conduct toward obedience to those in power.

In this context, the duty of individuals working for the state shifts from serving the collective welfare to serving the whims of the ruling party. This reflects Bakunin's belief that the state, through its structures, suppresses freedom by coercing individuals to follow authority without question, even when it contradicts law and morality. This quote encapsulates the subversion of legal integrity in favor of political expediency, showing how power structures manipulate concepts of duty and law to maintain dominance, at the expense of justice and individual freedom.

4.2 Power Disparities & Challenging Institutional Authority

The protest against organized institutional authority forms a central idea, as characters grapple with the pervasive corruption and authoritarian control of the state. Through their defiance, resistance, and, at times, passive non-compliance, the protagonist exposes the brutality and moral decay of institutions such as the police. These institutions, depicted as wielding unchecked power, often enforce societal control through violence, coercion, and manipulation. The characters' protests are not always loud or overt; they also manifest in acts of quiet defiance, refusal to comply with unethical directives, and the courage to challenge the status quo. In doing so, they highlight the systemic abuse of authority and the class distinctions that exacerbate the unequal distribution of power. Their resistance, though fraught with danger, serves as a form of rebellion against the institutional violence that seeks to suppress individual autonomy and justice.

"I'm afraid everything that you have asked for is not possible" (Hamid, 2013, p. 9). Constantine's refusal to execute Major Rommel's directive to hand over the prisoner is a significant act of defiance that aligns closely with Bakunin's (1882/1970) anarchist concept as narrated in *God and the State*. By rejecting the orders of his superior, Constantine challenges the hierarchical structure of institutional authority, which Bakunin perceived as inherently oppressive and designed to perpetuate state control. In Bakunin's view, the state functions as an apparatus of domination, maintaining its power through coercion, violence, and manipulation. This refusal reflects a broader rejection of the state's authority which is systematically upheld through mechanisms of resistance. Constantine's act of resistance in the novel can thus be interpreted as fundamentally anarchistic because it represents an attempt to reclaim individual autonomy in the face of an oppressive institutional order. By disrupting the chain of command and defying a direct order, he contests the legitimacy of a directive imposed by a superior officer.

This challenge to authority undermines the notion that obedience to the state is a moral obligation. Bakunin's philosophy emphasizes that individuals must resist authoritarian structures when these conflict with personal ethics and the broader societal well-being. Constantine's refusal epitomizes this ideal, as it is motivated by a commitment to justice rather than the preservation of rank or power. The significance of this act is further underscored by the class distinction embedded in the conflict. Constantine's identity as a civilian official stands in contrast to the military officers, who are the primary agents of state enforcement. The derision he faces as a bloody civilian exemplifies the institutional reinforcement of class distinctions. The hostility directed at him reveals how state authority, particularly in the form of the military, views civilians as subordinate and incapable of exercising legitimate resistance.

When Major Rommel's fury becomes palpable in response to Constantine's defiance, the moment encapsulates a crucial tension in the novel, the clash between military dominance and civilian autonomy, where resistance to the state's coercive machinery emerges as a matter of principle rather than one of hierarchy or power. This dynamic vividly illustrates

Bakunin's critique of institutional power and its role in maintaining class hierarchies. For Bakunin, the ruling class employs the state's apparatus to suppress and control lower strata, using violence as a tool of social and political control. In this context, Constantine's resistance is not only a rejection of a specific command but also a broader protest against the entrenched institutional structures that perpetuate violence and social inequality. His defiance symbolizes a confrontation with the very nature of institutionalized power, where the state's coercive mechanisms are deployed to reinforce class divisions and to uphold its dominance.

Class distinction is central to understanding Constantine's act of defiance. His position as a civilian official places him outside the traditional command structures of the military, creating a distinct power dynamic between him and Rommel. The source of Constantine's resistance arises from a sense of intellectual and moral integrity, in contrast to the Major's authority, which is backed by the coercive power of the state's military apparatus. This divergence in the basis of their authority—military force versus principled defiance—highlights a class-based disparity in how power is both perceived and enacted.

From Bakunin's anarchist perspective, Constantine's resistance is emblematic of the broader struggle against the state's machinery of repression. Bakunin views the state as an institution that enforces its will through mechanisms of force, often manifesting in the form of military or police power. By standing his ground and refusing to comply, Constantine embodies Bakunin's ideal of resisting the oppressive structures of the state, thereby challenging its authority and the violence it employs to sustain its control. His defiance serves as a critique of the state's role in perpetuating social hierarchies and its reliance on institutional violence to suppress any form of dissent or resistance. In the novel, the resistance of the main characters against institutional violence reveals a complex interplay of power dynamics, where the state and non-state actors vie for dominance through a mutual deployment of violence.

The characters' actions serve to expose the repressive nature of state institutions while simultaneously critiquing the ethical and socio-political frameworks governing their operations. The novel captures this conflict using the anarchist lens, as theorized by Bakunin, to illustrate how institutional power, in its many forms, tends to operate through coercion and suppression, highlighting the interdependence between state authority and its violent strategies. Akbar Khan's role as the state's instrument of repression is central to the narrative. He is a gendarme dispatched to reassert the state's control over Karachi, where the United Front's (UF) political influence has undermined the government's authority. His duty is to neutralize the UF's hold over the city, initiating a series of violent confrontations between the state and the party's militant wing. "Akbar's status as a "gendarme" represents "the state's aggression clothed in an inoffensive uniform"(Hamid, 2013, p.69). This characterization immediately sets the tone for the violent reciprocity that defines his engagement with the UF, blurring the line between state-sanctioned force and criminal aggression.

From the outset, "Akbar's appointment as the Station incharge of Orangi's "godforsaken locality" (Hamid, 2013, p. 40) in 1998 signifies the beginning of a power struggle between the UF and the state. The local UF ward head greets every new police officer with a rocket attack, openly challenging state authority and asserting territorial dominance. This act parodies the state's power, underscoring the UF's defiance. The absence of police uniforms in the station—a result of the officers' fear of the UF's wrath—symbolizes their coerced submission to the UF. As Akbar succinctly points out, "Either our people have been scared away, or they've become collaborators"(Hamid, 2013, p. 41), encapsulating the extent to which fear has paralyzed the state's enforcement apparatus. Akbar's approach to re-establishing state power is marked by a brutality that mirrors the UF's tactics. His actions, such as dragging a ward boss through the street by his hair, illustrate a repressive response

designed to humiliate and intimidate the UF's operatives: "I took the...ward boss and pulled him down the street by his hair...I battered him in front of all"(Hamid,2013,p. 34). This confrontation exemplifies Bakunin's (1873/1990) assertion that "the state's violence is only different in form and not in function" from other organized forms of violence"(p.13). The state and UF's mutual dependence on physical force to maintain control further erodes the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate use of violence.

The UF's dominance in Orangi, described as ruling "like a medieval fiefdom"(Hamid,2013,p. 43), transcends mere coercion, establishing a sophisticated parallel system of governance. The Hajji Camp, depicted as a fortress equipped with armaments and torture cells operates as a shadowy mechanism of repression that rivals the state's police stations. Through extortion, the UF exerts control over local businesses, proving that "the true power lay there" (Hamid, 2013, p.43). This intertwining of economic exploitation and militarized dominance underscores Bakunin's (1873/1990), critique of the state's complicity in capitalist oppression: "Enormous centralized states serve to protect capitalist interests for the ruling elite because only a state is capable of exploiting a large number of people" (p. 13). Here, the UF functions as a pseudo-state, mirroring the exploitative dynamics Bakunin attributes to state structures, while simultaneously exposing the vacuum created by ineffective governance.

Akbar's raid on the Hajji Camp, described as a massively armed operation, seeks to dismantle this rival power structure and reassert state authority. The imagery of the camp being "torn down" and "smashed open" (Hamid, 2013, p. 73) reflects the state's aggressive methodology, where power is reclaimed not through reconciliation but through outright destruction. This climactic confrontation transforms the UF's citadel—a symbol of a parallel repressive order—into rubble, symbolically affirming the state's dominance. However, the state's reliance on violent destruction to counter the UF raises questions about its own legitimacy and mirrors the anarchic tendencies Bakunin critiques. In dismantling the UF's oppressive system, the state paradoxically employs similar methods of aggression, blurring the lines between legitimate authority and anarchical violence.

Through this violent contestation, the novel portrays the Pakistani state as a Bakunian aggressive state that employs the same strategies of repression as the groups it seeks to quell. Akbar's role, while nominally in service of the law, reveals the ethical ambiguities inherent in institutionalized violence. His actions, though successful in the short term, expose the fragility of a socio-political order that depends on violence to sustain itself. In sum, the novel's depiction of institutional violence and resistance highlights the cyclical nature of repression, where the state's attempt to restore order through coercion, perpetuates a broader culture of aggression. By presenting the state and its adversaries as equally complicit in perpetuating violence, *The Prisoner* (2013) challenges the reader to reconsider the legitimacy of state power and its claim to moral authority. In doing so, the narrative serves as a powerful critique of organized violence in the modern nation-state, resonating deeply with Bakunin's anarchist point of view.

5. Conclusion

The analysis reveals two main findings: first, the state employs ideological constructs such as national honor and security as rhetorical devices to justify its actions and legitimize its use of violence, framing repression as a form of patriotism and protection. This manipulation obscures the true nature of the state's coercive measures, presenting them as morally righteous and necessary. Second, the unchecked power and coercion of state institutions, as exemplified by the complicity between police and criminal enterprises, indicate a deeply entrenched relationship between the state and parallel systems of authority. This corruption undermines the legitimacy of state institutions, transforming them into mechanisms of control

serving political and elite interests rather than public welfare, thereby reinforcing Bakunin's critique of the inherently oppressive nature of hierarchical authority. Hamid's *The Prisoner* portrays resistance against institutional authority and the cyclical nature of state violence through its characters' defiance against the coercive machinery of the state. First, the text reveals that organized state institutions such as the police enforce their power through brutality, coercion, and manipulation, which often triggers counter-resistance from those subjected to their control. Second, the novel demonstrates that the state's reliance on violence to maintain authority blurs the boundary between legitimate and illegitimate force, making it indistinguishable from the tactics employed by militant groups like the UF. Akbar Khan's actions against the UF's influence in Karachi, marked by ruthless strategies, highlight how the state's aggression mirrors the violence it seeks to suppress. Ultimately, the novel critiques both the state's moral legitimacy and its role in perpetuating violence, underscoring how institutional repression contributes to a perpetuating cycle of aggression and conflict that destabilizes any claim to ethical governance.

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