

# Aesthetics in Resistance Poetry: Re-reading Dennis Brutus and Habib Jalib

**Komal Naeem and Fatima Syeda**

## **Introduction**

This research will focus on studying resistance towards the state in the poetry of Dennis Brutus and Habib Jalib through textual analysis, in the context of South African and South Asian respectively. By employing Nguigi wa Thiong'o's theory of resistance as outlined in his work *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams: Towards a Critical Theory of the Arts and the State in Africa*, the research contends to comparatively analyse the selected poetic pieces of these two poets. It will examine how poets in developing countries resist against the state through their power of writing, and hence struggle for freedom. The research will also focus on the aesthetics of poetry and utilise an aestheticised perspective to understand the poetic resistance as a constructive resistance. Such a resistance creates awareness among the masses oppressed by the state and is a vehicle of social and political criticism.

While Dennis Brutus counters White supremacy, Habib Jalib on the other hand confronts the political hegemony of dictators from within his own people, in his time. The research intends to comparatively analyse, through the relationship of “the art of the state” and “the state of art,” the power of the resistance poets towards the state's oppression and power.<sup>1</sup> It intends to keep in view the different political scenarios—that is, the colonial and post-colonial regimes—while analysing the similar struggle of the poets for freedom against the tyranny of the state. Dennis Brutus and Habib Jalib were writing in different parts of the world, South Africa and Pakistan

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Komal Naeem is an M.Phil. Researcher at Forman Christian College University, Lahore, Pakistan with interest in socio-political and religious narratives.

Fatima Syeda is Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Forman Christian College University, Lahore, Pakistan with expertise in South Asian Literary genres.

<sup>1</sup> Nguigi wa Thiong'o, *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 1.

respectively, but they were struggling for the similar cause of freedom from the state's oppression. By employing the similar means of resistance poetry, in similar time period (specifically the mid-twentieth century), they consciously grappled with the political injustices of the state and resisted against its authority over race, class, ethnicity or other power structures. Hence, the research aims to analyse in detail the political resistance as a common strand in the poetry of these two poets.

Through Nguigi wa Thiong'o's theory of resistance from his book *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams*, this article aims to study how the poetic resistance in the colonial and post-colonial states respectively may become a converging point for comparison of the two poets. The main focus of this research is to study the intense anti-colonial struggles of these aforementioned poets through the resistance of their writing to overthrow any kind of hegemony. The relationship between "intellectuals, the state and the control of psychic space" depicted through the poetry of these poets and the way their power of writing threatened the state's power by breaking the psychic closures will also be discussed in detail.<sup>2</sup>

### **Life and Activism of Dennis Brutus and Habib Jalib**

Dennis Brutus (1924-2009) was one of the most revolutionary poets of South Africa. He was a literary activist who turned into a political activist and challenged White supremacy through his works. He was one of the key political activists in the history of the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, writing poetry against the political and racial hegemony of the state. His literature was banned under the Gagging clause and he was asked to sign a 'one-way exit' agreement that inferred he will be imprisoned if he returns to his country. Thus he was sent into exile, but it did not stop him from resisting against the state. He kept writing and stimulating the people through his resistance poetry.

Similarly, Habib Jalib (1928-1993) was an important revolutionary poetic figure of Pakistan. He was a literary activist who, like Brutus, turned into a political activist and openly resisted against the dictatorial representations. He was imprisoned and beaten several times for writing against dictatorial voices, but nothing stopped him from expressing his defiant views on the political hegemony of the rulers. His resistance poetry

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<sup>2</sup> Nguigi, *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams*, p. 71.

opposed the oppression by the state and its authoritarianism. His poetry was chanted as protest slogans throughout the country.

### **Literature Review**

A great amount of research has been done on the poetry of Dennis Brutus and Habib Jalib to understand their work as resistance literature. For instance, in the article 'Echo of Poesy in South Africa's Politics: Form and Resistance in Dennis Brutus' "Simple Lust" and "Letters to Martha", Kalu Obasi Kalu writes about the apartheid movement in South Africa and several other protests following the apartheid through resistance in literature, particularly analysing selected poetic pieces of Dennis Brutus.<sup>3</sup> Kalu intends to focus not only on the politics of apartheid in South Africa, but also on the emotions of the poet depicted through "the several echoes of protest from various quarters and dimensions."<sup>4</sup> Kalu analyses the emotional condition of the poet when Brutus protests against the hegemony of the Whites and the imprisonment of the Blacks for voicing their concerns by showing "the brooding and longing for freedom by Black natives of South Africa" through his poetry.<sup>5</sup> While the politics of apartheid is an important backdrop in this research article, the focus of the researcher is on the poet's desire for freedom from the oppression of apartheid hegemony. Therefore, keeping in view his research limitations, Kalu's study particularly deals with the emotions, lamentations and desires of Dennis Brutus through his poetry, which serve as a resistance to the oppressive conditions prevalent in South Africa in those times.

Extending on the argument of Kalu, the researcher Eunice Ngongkum focuses on the geographical details of South Africa to argue that "the landscape of South Africa serves as a multifaceted metaphor for the liberation of the black population."<sup>6</sup> Ngongkum writes that Brutus employs the landscapes of South Africa in his poetry as "an artistic statement against the politics of segregation."<sup>7</sup> Through the metaphorical use of "land," she

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<sup>3</sup> Kalu Obasi Kalu, 'Echo of Poesy in South Africa's Politics: Form and Resistance in Dennis Brutus' "Simple Lust" and "Letters to Martha", *English Linguistics Research*, vol. 6, no. 4 (November 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Kalu, 'Echo of Poesy in South Africa's Politics', p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> Kalu, 'Echo of Poesy in South Africa's Politics', p. 28.

<sup>6</sup> Eunice Ngongkum, *The Concept of Place in the Poetry of Dennis Brutus* (Alizés: Revue angliciste de La Réunion, 2008), p. 61.

<sup>7</sup> Ngongkum, 'The Concept of Place in the Poetry of Dennis Brutus', p. 61.

claims that Brutus touches upon a range of political, cultural and social issues during apartheid in South Africa. Land, therefore, is not only a place of departure in his poetry, but is also an extended metaphor through which the poet talks of attachment and spiritual connection to his country. Through the focus on the poetic devices, diction, and lay out of the selected pieces of Dennis Brutus' poetry, Ngongkum argues that the poet protests against the politics and the brutality of the apartheid regime through geographical details. Thus, "[p]oetry of revolt then becomes the medium of presenting, through elemental landscape images, different facets of the landscape as well as the poet's response to these."<sup>8</sup> The focus of the researcher has been on analysing Brutus' poetic pieces as protest literature demanding liberation of his country from the clutches of the hegemony of Whites.<sup>9</sup> This is unlike Kalu, who talks about Brutus' poetry through a generalised lens of poetry as resistance literature, analysing poet's emotions and desire for freedom. Ngongkum has developed her argument particularly around the metaphor of land or place and discusses Brutus' poetic resistance and his struggles against the hegemony through the different imageries of land to demonstrate the need for emancipation of Blacks in their country.

Similarly, Kontein Trinya claims that the politics of apartheid cannot be separated from the poetry which is the resistance of the poet for the state. However, he speaks of Brutus' ideas as utilising two binary oppositions, that is, the apartheid oppressors on the one side, and the oppressed people suffering the hegemonic system on the other side. Trinya argues that social context is significant for understanding the poetry of Brutus, which is a protest against the apartheid movement. Through the deliberate use of conflict and paradoxes in the poems, Trinya argues, Brutus creates "psycho-physical" experiences that baffle as well as enlighten the readers of the existing conflicts in South Africa (segregated on the basis of race).<sup>10</sup> By studying the contradictions and conflicts in the poetry of Dennis Brutus, the researcher has vivified the condition of the segregated South Africa against which the poet resists through his poetry to overthrow the dominating power structures. The structural and thematic oppositions in the poem help in understanding the "contradictions of the poet's own society" that have given

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<sup>8</sup> Ngongkum, 'The Concept of Place in the Poetry of Dennis Brutus', p. 77.

<sup>9</sup> Ngongkum, 'The Concept of Place in the Poetry of Dennis Brutus'.

<sup>10</sup> Kontein Trinya, 'Mirrors of Social Paradox in the Poetry of Dennis Brutus', *International Journal of Educational Development*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2012), p. 5.

birth to an autocratic state.<sup>11</sup> Three of these researches have studied the selected poetic pieces of Dennis Brutus through specific lenses. Although these mentioned researchers have analysed the protest or resistance in the poetry of Brutus, their approaches have been starkly different.

Likewise, Habib Jalib's poetry has been analysed through specific as well as general lenses by many scholars. For instance, Muhammad Iqbal Chawla discusses religious extremism in Pakistan through analysis of Habib Jalib's poetry. The religious extremism in Pakistan "helped in shaping the sectarian differences following a mushrooming of some extreme-oriented sectarian outfits which led to some serious incidents at times, writes Chawla, analysing the poetry of Habib Jalib.<sup>12</sup> Thus the researcher's study demonstrates that Jalib's poetry is a resistance against this religious extremism and shows that the artists always stood against the individual or collective extremist acts, always opposing violence by expressing their concerns through literary or artistic mediums.

While Iqbal Chawla's research focuses on studying the Pakistani society, its politics and the extremism of religion through Jalib's poetry, Almas Awan, Shadab Fatima, and Tarique declare that Jalib's political resistance particularly concerns the capitalist power structures that oppress the working class individuals. They contend that "the world of Jalib is divided into classicism where the bourgeois and the ruling class is deriving benefits at the cost of proletariat."<sup>13</sup> The political power structures as well as the elitist system of Pakistan is critiqued by analysing Jalib's resistance poetry that targets the oppressive capitalist and elitist system of the country.<sup>14</sup> The focus of the researchers has been on the various prevailing issues of Jalib's times and have analysed resistance against religious extremism and political resistance in his poetry. It is through his poetry that Jalib emerged as an important democratic voice in the country. Moreover, the researchers have also critiqued Habib Jalib's poetry through the Marxist lens. They examined the resistance of the poet against the class divides that mar the

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<sup>11</sup> Trinya, 'Mirrors of Social Paradox in the Poetry of Dennis Brutus', p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Muhammad Iqbal Chawla, 'Intellectual Resistance to Extremism in Pakistan: A Historical Discourse', *An International Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 30, no. 2 (2015), p. 122.

<sup>13</sup> Almas Awan, Shadab Fatima, and Tarique, "'From The Haves to Have Nots": A Marxist Analysis of Habib Jalib's Poem "Ay Chand Yahan Na Nikla Ker" (O Moon, Do Not Rise Here)', *International Journal of English and Education*, vol. 8, no. 4 (2019): p. 27.

<sup>14</sup> Awan, Fatima, and Tarique, "'From the Haves to the Have Nots'".

rights of the people and oppress them. This created a strong need in intellectuals like Jalib to resist through their writings against these power structures to eliminate the inequalities and pervade an egalitarian system.

While some scholars have conducted a number of researches on the two poets Dennis Brutus and Habib Jalib separately, none of them have done a comparative study on the two at once. Moreover, a number of researchers, such as Kalu, Ngongkum, Trinya and Chawla, have analysed resistance in the poetry of Brutus and Jalib by different perspectives. For instance, resistance has been studied through emotions of the poet depicted in the selected poetic verses of Brutus, studying geographical details through extended metaphor of land in Brutus' poetry to understand politics of segregation and resistance against it and focusing on social paradoxes in the poetic pieces of the poets. This research traces resistance in poetry through particularly analysing religious extremism in Jalib's poetry, as well as resistance in Jalib's poetry through Marxist analysis. While the researchers have focused on these multiple strands, there has not been any research to particularly compare the resistance in the poetry of Brutus and Jalib. Furthermore, the resistance in the poetry of these poets as a power to dismantle the political hegemonies of the state and breaking the physis closures has not been researched before. This gap will be filled in through my research.

### **Analysing Poetic Pieces of Dennis Brutus and Habib Jalib**

My research intends to do a comparative analysis of Brutus and Jalib and study resistance in their poetry through the power of their writing that dismantled the political power structures. I will analyse poetic resistance in their poetry while keeping in view Brutus' and Jalib's poetry as part of colonial and post-colonial states respectively, as this is a point of divergence between the two poets. The research will analyse how the oppression of the political hegemonies of the third world countries is however, similar and converges the poets' resistance against the state. The resistance against the autocratic power of the state through the relationship between intellectuals, state and the resistance in the poetic works of both these poets will be under focus. Moreover, understanding the role that the state plays in suppressing their dissent voices and the poetic resistance that threatens the state's power will be discussed in detail.

Nguigi wa Thiong'o writes in his book *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams*:

The pen gives visible form to the words of a writer; the gun visible authority to the words of a ruler. In every absolutist state the holder of the pen, which forces words on paper, is seen as the enemy of the holder of the gun, which enforces words of the law. Penpoints and gunpoints thus stand in confrontation.<sup>15</sup>

Nguigi's statement places pens and guns in confrontation to one another. Hence, his statement vividly shows the power of the pen in the writer's hand, producing poetic expressions and rebelling through his powerful words. These words pose a threat to the authority of the state that holds laws in its hands to defend injustices in the name of justice. In both the colonial and the post-colonial cases, the state oppresses the voice of the writers and intellectuals to maintain their political hegemony. The role of state and the arts is crucial to understand the status of people in any country. Nguigi asserts that the oppression of the rulers is combated by the writers who produce words on paper and are termed as rebels for employing the power of words to dismantle the hegemony of the state by exposing it. Thus the state tries to suppress their dissenting voices. The work of the poets like Brutus and Jalib thus stands in direct confrontation to their colonial and post-colonial states respectively. Hence, it is significant that they raise their dissenting voices that serve to understand the relationship of "the art of the state" and "the state of art."<sup>16</sup> The art of the state is to suppress the voices which in turn adversely affect the state of the art that is censored and banned from the public outreach because the artists/poets in turn resist the dominance of the state.

Writing during the colonial times of White supremacy in South Africa, Brutus was one of the most rebellious poets of South Africa who openly resisted against the apartheid movement in 1960s. He was a threat to the power of the supremacist and racist state. His resistance poetry is proof of this threatening power expressed through his poetic words. His work produced through pen points stand in confrontation to the oppressive gunpoints of the state. In one poem named 'What is the soul of Africa?' Brutus resists against the brutal regime of White supremacists by raising questions that express his anger for the political authorities suppressing the Blacks in South Africa. He writes:

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<sup>15</sup> Nguigi, *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams*, p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> Nguigi, *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams*, p. 1.

What is the soul of Africa?  
What is it?  
Is there a soul of Africa?  
Is it simply that we have  
contrived to be what humans are  
while everywhere humanity  
was being deformed?<sup>17</sup>

Brutus questions the state's brutal physical assaults and the violent acts against coloured people while claiming to protect the Whites. He outrageously questions the soul of Africa. Is it only the protection of the Whites at the brutal cost of killing the Blacks? He is outraged at the hegemonic racist rule of the masters who have denied humanity to the Blacks. Brutus' resistance towards the state for the injustices done to his own people, expressed through his resistance poetry, is similar to Jalib's resistance to the hegemonic rule expressed in his poetry. Although Jalib was writing in the post-colonial times in 1960s in Pakistan, the spirit of resistance in his poetry is similar to Brutus, who was writing in the colonial times in the similar decades of the twentieth century. The defiance towards the hegemonic rule of the tyrant rulers unites their struggles and cause of resistance. The colonial and post-colonial eras seemingly diverge the poets; however, the resistance through art against the state and their struggles for freedom against the political hegemonies deeply connects them. Nguigi rightly asserts that "The state [itself] ... is an instrument of control in the hands of whatever is the dominant force. Art, on the other hand, in its beginnings was always an ally of the human search for freedom from hostile nature and nurture."<sup>18</sup> The tyrannical state keeps its control over the narrative being produced by the resisting voices and tries to suppress them in every way. The artist's defying art or the poet's resistant poetic works, in other words, is the only source of liberation for the oppressed people. It gives them light to understand and rebel against the subjugating forces. Such a dictatorial state as portrayed through Brutus' and Jalib's poetry takes authority in its hands and exerts control forcefully, be it on the conditions of race, ethnicity, class, neo-colonial systems or other power structures. The resistance against such hegemonic systems in developing countries comes

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<sup>17</sup> Dennis Brutus, *Poetry & Protest: A Dennis Brutus Reader*, eds Lee Sustar and Aisha Karim (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2006), pp. 247-248, lines 1-7.

<sup>18</sup> Nguigi, *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams*, p. 20.



out as a common strand in understanding the challenging voices like those of Brutus and Jalib in their autocratic states.

Jalib's 'Zulmat ko Zia' (translated as 'Darkness as Light') is one such important poetic piece that resists the tyranny by questioning the despotism of the state. His questions are directed towards the dictatorial regime of Zia-ul-Haq and are similar to Brutus due to the rebellious and outrageous spirit of resistance to the oppressive power structures. He writes:

Speak the truth and you will be flogged and imprisoned,  
This life is caught in the grip of lies.  
Human beings are cowering in terror,  
while blood sucking monsters are on the rampage.  
How can this cruelty be called kindness?  
...  
How can I call the dark night the dawn?  
How can I call the toxic fumes a morning breeze?  
How can I refer a man as God?<sup>19</sup>

The poet challenges the authoritarianism of the state by refusing to turn a blind eye towards the atrocities being done to his country. He questions the brutalities of the dictatorial state towards the people who uplift their voices for truth. These questions not only show the refusal, but the resistance of the poet towards the state for trying to justify the cruelties and injustices. The state oppresses the individuals, laying bare its brutalities exercised by the alleged rebellious writers/artists who unmask the oppression of the state for its people. Hence the art, or in particular terms the poetry, that is being produced in such states stands in direct confrontation to the cruelties of the state with the artists struggling to find freedom.

Brutus and Jalib have been two of the most rebellious and dissent voices of South Africa and Pakistan respectively. Writing to resist through their poetry in the middle of 1960s, these two writers were at several points imprisoned, beaten and silenced for the power of their resistance poetry that became a threat to the state. Their books were banned from publishing in an attempt not only to silence the single voice, but to suppress the echoes of resistance that could be produced as a result of their mighty words of resistance.

Brutus' poems 'In a country which denies...' and 'I am a rebel and freedom is my cause' are two most politically resistant pieces that caused great uprising among the masses in South Africa. The poet challenges the

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<sup>19</sup> Habib Jalib, 'Zulmat ko Zia,' lines 11-19.

power structures through these politically powerful narratives. He explicitly resists against the injustices and brutalities of the state and writes:

In a country which denies that men  
and women are human, where the  
Constitution excludes them as subhumans,  
the creative act is an act  
of dissent and defiance: creative  
ability is a quintessential part  
of being human...<sup>20</sup>

He attacks the inhumanity of the state that does not treat men and women as human beings, depriving its people of the basic humanity. Creativity and the powerful creative expressions produced by the dissent voices in any artistic medium are considered as acts of “dissent and defiance” in the eyes of the state.<sup>21</sup> Thus the state stands against the resistant representatives. Similarly, the state took strict actions against Brutus for penning down defiant views in his poetic works. The structural view of the poem shows that Brutus has employed free verse in his poetry as an act of defiance and is resisting against all the power structures. Moreover, to emphasise the worthlessness of the Black men and women in the eyes of the state, he deliberately writes all the words in lower case. It is only the Constitution that has a capital ‘C’, demonstrating that the colonial state only values the apartheid laws and constitution segregating the Whites from Blacks. Hence, the tyrannical forces dehumanise and kill the Blacks on the basis of their skin colour, denying them their basic rights to live as free citizens in their country. The brutalities and sufferings of Black men and women are addressed by Brutus in his poem and he resists against the oppression of the state by the powerful and resistant state of art. Although the state silenced him and punished him for using his creative powers to create awareness in the masses, he claims in an assertive tone:

... to assert one’s  
Creativity is also to assert one’s  
Humanity. This is a premise on which  
I have acted all my life and it is  
the premise I have offered to others  
as an inspiration.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Brutus, *Poetry & Protest*, p. 370, lines 1-7.

<sup>21</sup> Brutus, *Poetry & Protest*, p. 360, line 5.

<sup>22</sup> Brutus, *Poetry & Protest*, p. 360, lines 7-12.

Not only does he resist to the authorities by vivifying the importance of poetry and arts in breaking the codes of silence and oppression for the people, but his “art tries to restore suppressed voices to the land. It tries to give voice back to the silenced.”<sup>23</sup> Brutus resists with a hope to dismantle the power structures that segregate the Blacks. He achieves this purpose by using words in his poetry which have a clear sense of positive power and ideological systems. Similarly, by stating “I am a rebel and freedom is my cause”, it is very brave of Brutus to explicitly manifest his rebellion in his poetry. He seems to be struggling for the freedom of his people from the colonial oppressors and expresses his desire for a democratic country. He writes:

My cause is a dream of freedom  
And you must help me dream my reality:  
For why should I not dream and hope?  
Is not revolution making reality of hopes?<sup>24</sup>

Brutus asserts that the dream of freedom is not just an elusive hope; with a firm belief he intends to resist against the power structures and turn his dreams into reality. He questions as an act of defiance why he should not dream and hope. It is through challenging the state and its oppression that one can bring changes in reality and turn the dreams of freedom, democracy and equality into reality. Similar to Brutus’ resistance and dreams are Jalib’s ideals of freedom and democracy. In the poem ‘The City of Darkness Will Not Last’, Jalib expresses his hopes of better democratic days free from the oppression of the brutal dictators. His tone is aggressive and rebellious as he directly challenges the oppression of the state. He writes:

O the sons of decrepit system!  
O the children of dark night!  
This black night is not perpetual<sup>25</sup>

He challenges the despotic rulers that darkness will not last forever and their oppression will come to an end one day. Written in free verse style much like Brutus’ resistance poetry, Jalib also became a threat by resisting through the might of his poetic words on paper. The free verse style serves to strengthen the element of resistance in the poetic verses by structurally and thematically reflecting the spirit of resistance. Harry R. Warfel notes that in the twentieth century “[p]oetry was called upon to be a vital medium for

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<sup>23</sup> Nguigi, *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams*, p. 18.

<sup>24</sup> Brutus, *Poetry & Protest*, p. 360, lines 4-7.

<sup>25</sup> Habib Jalib, ‘The City in Darkness Will Not Last’, lines 1-3.

discussing the social problems of the era” and the poems were composed in free verse because it became “an outward symbol of radicalism.”<sup>26</sup> Free verse reflects resistance and defiance by rejecting all types of syllable, foot, line or strophe etc. Moreover, it was not merely “a revolt against ... tyranny but a device for bringing man’s creative powers to their fullest capability.”<sup>27</sup> Brutus and Jalib employed free verse in their poems to mirror the resistance and to cause an upstir on the state’s control by using creative power to the extreme degree. ‘The City of Darkness Will Not Last’ uses the imagery of darkness and night to throw light on the oppressive and inhumane ways of the state. He uses the images such as “black night,” “dark night,” and “city of darkness” to expose the state for its injustices and brutalities that have caused gloominess over the city and its people. Nguigi interprets this darkness caused by the autocratic states through Plato’s Allegory of the Cave. He analyses it in colonial and post-colonial contexts to assert that the allegory portrays the relationship between “the few who have escaped into truth and reality and the rest of the prisoners in the cave.” Those of the resistant voices, like Jalib and Brutus, see the truth of oppression of the state and the ignorance of the nations blinded as well as restricted by the state.<sup>28</sup> Jalib, therefore, is represented as the carrier of light who knows the bitter truth of the state’s violence. He aims to raise awareness among the people stuck in darkness by dispelling the ignorance and pains inflicted by the state oppressors. By expressing through power of resistance and domination in his poetic words he wants his voice to reach every ear. He writes:

How long these tales of darkness will last?

A new morning is about to beam

...

The morning sun will shine,

The spell of ignorance will dispel.

The light of knowledge and intellect,

Will spread in all over these households.<sup>29</sup>

As a resistance towards the state, once again he questions the condition of the prevailing darkness and threatens that it will soon come to a halt. The new morning is symbolic of the hope that the dominant power structures that

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<sup>26</sup> Harry R. Warfel, ‘A Rationale of Free Verse’, *Jahrbuch für Amerikastudien*, vol. 13 (1968), p. 232.

<sup>27</sup> Warfel, ‘A Rationale of Free Verse’, p. 229.

<sup>28</sup> Nguigi, *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams*, p. 54.

<sup>29</sup> Jalib, ‘The City in Darkness Will Not Last’, lines 5-6, 9-12.

have marred the life of the people will demolish. The light of knowledge and awareness will spread in every nook and corner. People will eventually become aware of the injustices being done to them. Both Brutus and Jalib wrote resistance poetry and through the power of their writing, they actively agitated their people for change by wrestling with the authoritarianism of the state.

Both of these poets openly resist and defy the dominant power structures by questioning the ruthlessness of the state and unfolding the political realities for the readers. Therefore, they are seen by the despotic rulers as a threat for the state. Nguigi writes, “The more absolutist the state, the less it is likely to ask questions of itself or entertain questioning by others.”<sup>30</sup> The questions of these poets though their poetry comes as a resistance and threat to the autocratic state. The state in turn aims to silence these voices. Nguigi states, “Such a state regards those who ask questions as rebels, subversives, madmen” and violently subjugates them.<sup>31</sup> Be it Brutus’ resistance to the colonial rulers who racially tear apart the existence of Blacks under apartheid regime or Jalib’s defiance to the post-colonial rulers who act as Gods and have disrupted the life of the people; these poets confront the hegemonies of the state through enlightening the people by their powerful words that expose the state’s cruelties. One such confrontation is depicted through Jalib’s poem ‘Dastoor’ (translated as ‘Constitution’), which is a significant popular resistant piece of poetry in Pakistani resistance poetry. The poet’s tone is intensely aggressive and outrageous and resists to the political hegemonies by reiterating throughout the poem a couplet “I refuse to acknowledge, / I refuse to accept.”<sup>32</sup> He writes:

I am not afraid of execution,  
Tell the world that I am the martyr  
How can you frighten me with prison walls?  
This overhanging doom,  
This night of ignorance,  
I refuse to acknowledge,  
I refuse to accept.<sup>33</sup>

Jalib’s resistance in the poetry and the power of his words that vivify his undaunted spirit became a threat to the power of the vicious political

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<sup>30</sup> Nguigi, *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams*, p. 12.

<sup>31</sup> Nguigi, *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams*, p. 12.

<sup>32</sup> Habib Jalib, ‘Dastoor,’ lines 6-7.

<sup>33</sup> Jalib, ‘Dastoor,’ lines 8-14.

systems. Barbara Harlow writes that “Resistance literature calls attention to itself... as a political and politicized activity ... sees itself furthermore as immediately and directly involved in a struggle against ascendant or dominant forms of ideological and cultural production.”<sup>34</sup> Hence, Resistance poetry is one of the most effective medium to express resistance as well maintaining the aesthetics of the poetry. It not only serves as a means for the expression of personal identity or nationalist sentiment; poetry, says Harlow, “as a part of cultural institutions and historical existence of a people, is itself an arena of struggle.”<sup>35</sup> The struggle for freedom, liberation from the tyrant rulers, and hope for justice to be served; all are dealt by the resistant poets through their poetry. Harlow is right to assert that resistance literature in general and resistance poetry in particular is a political struggle against the hegemonies of the state. This is very well presented through Brutus and Jalib’s political poetic pieces that attack the politics of the state. Resistant poetry is powerful because it expresses the inexpressible ferocities and political, as well as social injustices of the state that everyone sees but is too blinded and silenced by the authority of the state to voice. For instance, Brutus wrote a poem entitled ‘Remembering June 16, 1976’ to memorialise the brutal killings of the young girls and boys by the state for raising their voice and protesting against the state over apartheid laws. While the whole country witnessed the murders of these young student protestors, no one dared to resist and speak against the viciousness of the state. Brutus, however, wrote a poem that not only mourned the brutal murdering of these young students but also depicted resistance towards the oppression of the state by threatening the state with the continuance of resistance and protests until liberation. He writes:

They are coming back:  
...  
the ghosts are coming back  
...  
those who oppose oppression are coming back  
demanding dignity  
challenging injustice  
they return to join a new generation  
they chant:  
resume the fight, resume the fight,

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<sup>34</sup> Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature* (New York: Methuen Inc., 1987), p. 29.

<sup>35</sup> Harlow, *Resistance Literature*, p. 33.

resume the fight.<sup>36</sup>

The protests and uprisings, it is asserted in the poem, will continue, reiterated by the poet through the repetition of the phrase “resume the fight” thrice in the poem. This chanting is the slogan of resistance to the oppressive state, representing the defiance at the collective level and not just the resistance of the poet alone. Structurally, the poem has no full stops and is written in free verse style to oppose the injustices of the autocratic power of the state. The lack of full stops gives the impression that there is no end to resistance and the fight against the state will continue unless the state yields in and stops its authoritarianism. The deliberate absence of full stops is poet’s way of posing a threat to the authority of the state. Hence, as Nguigi writes, “art arms silence with voices that, even when the bodies that carry them are crushed and ground to powder, will rise again, and multiply, and sing out their presence ... Art in this sense is silence that screams.”<sup>37</sup> Hence, the writing of the poet does not let the memory of the brutal killings of the protesting young students die out. Rather, the materiality of the words, in the poetic form, reaches out to a wider audience thereby making the resistance a threat to the hegemony of the state which has been trying to silence the few peacefully protesting voices.

Similarly, Jalib’s poem ‘The Mother’ also is a poetic piece of absolutely stern resistance that gives voice to the silences, and screams at the vicious nature of the state. The mother addresses the brutal killings of the people who stood and peacefully protested against the oppression of the state. Through the image of mother, Jalib mourns the merciless murdering of the innocent children who were struggling for freedom from the autocratic state. He writes:

As the tyrants, night and day  
With the blood of my children Holi play  
Besmirched in red  
As the children were shot dead  
The mother, in fury, said  
These pieces of my heart  
Should cry and I stand apart  
Looking on from afar  
This, I cannot do.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Brutus, *Poetry & Protest*, p. 253, lines 1, 14, 17-23.

<sup>37</sup> Nguigi, *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams*, p. 20.

<sup>38</sup> Habib Jalib, ‘The Mother,’ lines 8-16.

Through the mouthpiece of the mother, Jalib unmasks the atrocities of the state and portrays the mother as a resistant figure who is infuriated over the killings of the innocent children and vows to take revenge by refusing to be silenced. The poem not only gives voice to the mother in the poetic world, but in fact gives power to all the oppressed in the real world to stand and resist against the brutalities of the state. Hence the poet, through the figure of the mother, unmasks the injustices of the vicious state and the poem emerges as a resistance poetic piece that screams in the face of the oppressive power structures. Both Brutus and Jalib are the torch bearers and the strong resistant voices that enlighten their people by raising voices for their oppressed nations. Jalib, much like Brutus, does not employ full stops anywhere in the poem to offer an open and continual resistance against the power structures until freedom is achieved. The poetic power of the pen points thus opposes the gunpoints that are the tyrants of the colonial, post-colonial or neo-colonial hegemonic political structures.

Both Brutus and Jalib explicitly resist through their poetry against the colonial and post-colonial regimes. Hence, their powerful writing becomes a threat to dismantle the power structures. The state, on the other hand, does not let the resistance against it propagate, and in turn it battles with the artist/writer/poet by controlling the performance space of the artist. This is done either by imprisoning the poet/artist, sending them to exile, or banning their works from bringing change in the state's domination. As Nguigi writes, "[w]hile the state performs power, the power of the artist is solely in the performance ... [Hence,] the war between art and the state is really a struggle between ... enactments of power."<sup>39</sup> The performance and power of the poet lies in producing the resistance works of poetry, while the performance space is the physical, social and psychic forces in a society. The politics of the performance space is closely linked to the politics of the state's authority and the breaking of psychic closures is linked to the power of the poet's writing in resisting and dismantling the authoritarian colonial or post-colonial systems. Nguigi writes,

The performance space of the artist stands for openness; that of the state, for confinement. Art breaks down barriers between peoples; the state erects them ... Art yearns for maximum physical, social, and spiritual space for human action. The state tries demarcation, limitation, and control.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Nguigi, *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams*, p. 28.

<sup>40</sup> Nguigi, *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams*, p. 49.



Hence, the poetry of Brutus and Jalib vivifies that it is a performance that struggles to break free the oppressed people from confinement by demolishing the limitations imposed on them by the state. The confinement can be physical or psychic, and the prison that bars the poets from resisting against the state serves both as a physical enclosure as well as a metaphor for psychic enclosure in the colonial and post-colonial regimes. For a poet like Brutus, the confinement of performance space was due to being imprisoned on writing resistance poetry, as well as due to being sent into exile by the colonial supremacist state to stifle his voice. However, confined poets do not always accept their confinement conditions, and some even turn the physical or psychic prison conditions into those of freedom. With the poem, “An old black woman . . . , which Brutus wrote while he was imprisoned by state for his writings. He wrote and resisted from the confinement, therefore breaking the closures being enforced on him. Writing is his only means of resisting against the propaganda of the state. He muses,

An old black woman,  
suffering,  
tells me I have given her  
“new images”  
—a father bereaved  
by radical heroism  
finds consolation  
in my verse.  
then I know  
these are those I write for  
and my verse works.<sup>41</sup>

Brutus demonstrates that he writes because there are oppressed Black men and women who find hope and consolation through his poetry. The poetry gives them the voice that has been suppressed by the state and therefore, the poet also continues to write in his confinement. Similarly, even when Brutus was sent into exile by the state for his resistance poetry that led to uprisings in the country, he did not stop writing and resisting. In the poem ‘Above us, only clouds...’ while in his flight over the Atlantic after leaving South Africa, Brutus kept igniting the people through the hopes and resistance in his poetry. We can find in his poetry a strong resistance against the state for its efforts to silence his resistance. He writes:

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<sup>41</sup> Brutus, *Poetry & Protest*, p. 255, lines 1-11.

Above us, only sky  
below, cloud  
and below that  
cloud;  
below that  
sea;  
land is abolished,  
...  
Peace will come.  
We have the power  
the hope  
the resolution.  
Men will go home.<sup>42</sup>

The layout of the poem on paper reflects Brutus' distorted state of mind as he is forced to leave his people and his land. However, the chopped-up lines still convey the message of hope and resistance against the oppression of the state because Brutus refuses to stay silent despite the threats of the state. He did not refrain from giving hope to the people about change and freedom. Brutus asserts through the poem that while the whole nature is at peace, it is only the motherland that has been abolished and destructed. The land has suffered because its Black inhabitants have suffered at the hands of the White supremacist regime in South Africa. However, Brutus ends the poem on the note that there is power, hope and resolution, and therefore one day they will find peace and homely home in their land. His poetic performance continued even in the face of all the suppressing powers exerted by the state. Likewise, Jalib too was imprisoned for his resistance poetry, although he was not sent into exile. For Jalib the existence in the post-colonial state served as an exilic and confined condition. In this regard, his performance space was also a confinement for he never felt at ease and peace among the oppressive autocratic state. His internal confinements served as an enclosure for his external realities. In one of his poems entitled 'To Rakhshinda Zoya', composed in prison, he writes to his daughter:

She cannot say it, but then  
My little one manages to say  
Father, come home  
Father, come home

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<sup>42</sup> Brutus, *Poetry & Protest*, pp. 255, 259, lines 1-7, 15-19.

She cannot comprehend  
Why, in prison, I continue to stay  
And not return with her, hand in hand  
How should I explain to her  
That home, too, is like a prison.<sup>43</sup>

Jalib narrates an incident where his daughter came to visit him in jail and wanted her him to return back home with her. Jalib writes that she is not old enough to understand that for him prison and home both are alike. The oppression and brutalities of the state do not let him experience freedom and liberty even when he is not in prison. Jalib uses his confinement or prison as a metaphor that shows the psychic enclosure of the poet living in a post-colonial regime. He tries to break the confinement through his performance that is, his poetry which is seen as a resistance to the persecution by the state. The poetry thus struggles to break the silence by criticizing the state for its harsh and violent practices.

### **Conclusion**

This research, through an analysis of the selected poetic pieces of Dennis Brutus and Habib Jalib, deduces that the power of resistance in poetry threatens and dismantles the hegemonic structures by laying bare the atrocious nature of the state. This research has dealt with the textual and comparative analysis of the poems and has incorporated Nguigi's writing as the theoretical framework to trace thoroughly the resistance in the poetry of Brutus and Jalib. Furthermore, this research focused on an in depth analysis of the psychic closure and its manifestations through the poets' poetic resistance. However, the elements like social, economic, and nationalist closures were not the subject of this research, which can be taken up for research endeavours in the future.

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<sup>43</sup> Habib Jalib, 'To Rakshinda Zoya', lines 1-9.