

**EXPLORING HETEROTOPIA:
UNDERSTANDING INTERNMENT AND
DISPLACEMENT WITHIN GULAGS
THROUGH SELECTED TEXTS**

BY

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The undersigned certify that they have read the following thesis, examined the defense, are satisfied with the overall exam performance, and recommend the thesis to the Faculty of Arts & Humanities for acceptance.

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ABSTRACT

Title: Exploring Heterotopia: Understanding Internment and Displacement within Gulags through Selected Texts

The present research, *Exploring Heterotopia: Understanding Internment and Displacement within Gulags through Selected Texts*, investigates the representation of Gulags in *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes* (2015) by Guzel Yakhina and *Between Shades of Gray* (2011) by Ruta Sepetys through the theoretical lens of heterotopic spaces. Space studies, particularly those concerned with displacement and trauma, provide an essential framework for examining the lived realities within the Gulags, which were marked by oppression, exile, and forced labor. This research aims to illuminate the connection between heterotopia and the Gulag system, offering a valuable perspective on how oppressive spaces shape human experience. Both novels shed light on the harsh realities of the Soviet regime, portraying the horrors of exile, the brutality of internment, and the endurance of resistance. The writers foreground how individuals confronted displacement, loss, and fragmentation of identity while simultaneously negotiating the possibility of community and resilience within conditions of confinement. The central purpose of this research is to analyze how space within the Gulags impacts the lives of individuals and how such heterotopic spaces function in constructing, dismantling, and reshaping identity. The study contextualizes Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopia, further developed by anthropologist Michel Agier, to better understand the dynamics of internment and exclusion. In addition, Alexander Solzhenitsyn's monumental work *The Gulag Archipelago* (1958–1968) is employed to provide historical grounding and further reinforce the analysis. The research ultimately seeks to examine two core questions: the role of Gulags as heterotopic spaces in shaping identity, and how acts of struggle and resistance contribute to the formation of new communities within oppressive environments.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ZOHE	<i>Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes</i> (Published in English as <i>Zuleikha</i>)
BSOG	<i>Between Shades of Gray</i>

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my wonderful parents, whose endless love and support have been my greatest strength in every step of life. Thank you for believing in me always.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The concept of heterotopia provides a deep understanding of spaces that are real but exist outside the societal norms and structures. The theory of heterotopia provides a valuable lens through which the Gulag system introduced by the Soviet Union is analyzed by looking at the experiences of internment and displacement in the selected texts. The Gulags in the texts are the best example of the places in which the harsh conditions impact the internees psychologically as well as physically. Despite extensive research and documentation of the Gulag system in literary studies, there is still a gap that needs to be explored in context of these spaces as heterotopia.

In this research, the researcher focuses on the Gulags in the texts as heterotopic spaces in particular. The researcher aims to talk about the experiences of internment and displacement in the Gulags that play a crucial role in the texts and labels these Gulags as heterotopias by adapting the term coined by Michel Foucault in 1967 and engaged by Michel Agier in his works. The researcher applies the principles related to heterotopia in Ruta Sepetys's *Between Shades of Gray* (2011) and Guzel Yakhina's novel *Zuleikha* (2019), published in English as *Zuleikha* but literally translated as *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes*, explores the impact of heterotopic spaces on the lives of the literary characters who are forced to leave their homes and are bound to make a new home in the labour camps, struggling to survive through acts of resistance.

The Gulags also known as labour camps were places made for the individuals who were thought to be against the Soviet regime during the time of Stalin. These places were specially designed to segregate the individuals from the mainstream society. The Gulags also functioned as “other spaces” like heterotopias that subjected people to rigid structures of power and surveillance. This study applies the concept of Gulags to the selected novels highlighting them as sites that function as heterotopias, these sites not only contain the internees but also transform them into individuals having different identities as compared to the past. Although, the purpose of the Gulags was to break the will of the prisoners, but the individuals in these sites found different ways to resist and survive.

The individuals in the Gulags were internees who didn't go through that process of conventional imprisonment, they experienced internment that solely occurred due to the state policies and subjugated the people they thought were a threat to the governing regime. The process of internment not only involved taking away the freedom but only gave physical and psychological stress. But, despite this oppressive experience, this research examines how characters found their way out by struggling to survive through different modes of resistance.

Between Shades of Gray (2011) is a historical fiction that narrates the tale of a Lithuanian girl named Lina and her family sent to a labour camp during World War II. The novel tells about Lina and other captives who are forced to suffer hardships in the forced labour camp. Lina befriends other deportees and struggles to maintain hope in the face of hardships. The novel highlights the struggles of the characters to deal with their circumstances and depicts the inhumanity and cruelty of the Soviet regime. During Stalin's period, the Soviet Union started a system of forced labour camps, known as Gulags, to control the people whom they thought to be the enemies of the state. The Gulags are known to be one of the most ill-famed of all the camps, known for their bad conditions and ill-treatment of the prisoners. Many people were sent to the labour camps, including elderly individuals, women and children. The conditions in these camps were grinding, with people forced to work in extreme weather conditions. They also faced physical and psychological abuse.

Zuleikha (2019) is a novel that tells the story of a young Tatar woman named Zuleikha, who is forcefully imprisoned in a remote place in a Siberian gulag during the period of political turmoil that took place in the Soviet Union under the rule of Joseph Stalin from the late 1930s to the early 1950s. She is arrested and sent to Siberia in a settlement named Pit-Gorodok in Severo-Yeniseysky District along with other prisoners. In Siberia, Zuleikha is compelled to adjust to harsh conditions in a remote labour camp where she initially struggles for survival and later adapts to the environment. Both novels shed light on the experiences of those who suffered in the Soviet Union's forced labour camps, highlighting the strength of humans in the face of severe cruelty.

Through the analysis of these texts, this research examines the conditions of the characters and their encounters in the Gulags and explores the cruel experiences of

internment and how they navigate their identities in the heterotopic space. Spaces play an important role in the lives of individuals in the texts as these are not just physical locations but have several dimensions like political, social, cultural and psychological. The analysis of the selected novels aims to examine the geographical location in which the Gulags exist revolving around harsh conditions. The research also focuses on the social space in the Gulags that highlights the interactions, power dynamics and communal life of the detainees. The researcher studies the cultural practices within the Gulags and also the psychological impact of displacement and internment on the characters.

The researcher has selected *BSOG* by Ruta Sepetys and *ZOHE* by Guzel Yakhina as both the novels are set in the time of Stalin's rule. Both the novels, highlight the harsh realities of the gulags, internment and displacement. Moreover, the texts provide a solid ground for heterotopic reading that examines the lives of individuals under systems of extreme control. The Gulags in both the novels not only function as sites of oppression but also but also become sites of unexpected transformation, resistance, and redefinition of identity.

The choice of *Between Shades of Gray* and *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes* is intentional. Both novels combine historical accuracy with deeply human stories, making them ideal for a heterotopic reading. Sepetys draws from Lithuanian survivors' testimonies, while Yakhina builds on her grandmother's experiences in exile. Each work brings forward voices that were silenced in official Soviet history, allowing for a closer look at identity, resilience, and the experience of life in the Gulags. Their international reach also provides an opportunity to compare how stories of trauma and displacement are told and understood across cultures.

The research foregrounds how social identities and categories, such as race, gender, class, ethnicity, and nationality, intersect and interact to produce unique experiences of oppression and privilege. The study of the Gulag system based on social identities helps in understanding the multilayered experiences of people in the Gulags.

A deeper understanding of the authors' backgrounds further supports the selection for this study. Ruta Sepetys is a Lithuanian-American writer of historical fiction. She was born in Michigan, Sepetys is the daughter of a Lithuanian refugee.

Between Shades of Gray is Sepetys first novel published in 2011. Ruta states that the novel represents the "extreme suffering and tremendous hope" displayed by the people of the Baltics. Other novels written by her are *Out of the Easy* (2013), *Salt to the Sea* (2016), *The Fountains of Silence* (2019), and *I Must Betray You* (2023).

Guzel Yakhina is a Russian author and screenwriter. Guzel Shamilevna Yakhina was born in Kazan. Her mother is a doctor, while her father is an engineer. She is a winner of the Big Book literary prize and the Yasnaya Polyana Literary Award. She spoke Tatar at home and learned Russian only after she started going to daycare. Her debut novel *Zuleikha* appeared in the journal *Siberian Fires*. The novel is 'jvbased on her grandmother's experience of internment. Yakhina initially wrote the draft as a screenplay, and later rewrote it as a novel. Before being accepted for publication, the novel was rejected by multiple publishers.

Between Shades of Gray was adapted into the film "Ashes in the Snow" (2018), directed by Marius A. Markevicius. Film adaptations like this reach wider audiences and bring historical events to life in ways the written word sometimes cannot. They are often created by filmmakers and companies invested in historical storytelling, combining commercial goals with the desire to preserve memory. This adaptation in particular was an international collaboration, blending Lithuanian, American, and European perspectives to share the story globally.

Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes was adapted into a Russian television miniseries titled "Zuleikha" in 2020, directed by Egor Anashkin and starring Chulpan Khamatova in the title role. The series closely follows the novel's plot while also expanding certain subplots for dramatic effect. Like many literary adaptations, it sought to bring the story to audiences who might not engage with the written text, using the visual medium to immerse viewers in the atmosphere of Stalinist repression and Siberian exile. However, the series also sparked discussion and debate within Russia—some praising its artistic merit and others criticizing its portrayal of Soviet history—reflecting the ongoing tension over how this period is remembered.

Despite extensive research on the Gulag system, there still remains a gap in exploring these places as heterotopic that both deprive the internees from their past lives as well as reconstruct their identities for the future. Through the examination of the selected novels, this research mentions how Gulags as heterotopic spaces space

the social, psychological, and cultural experiences of the internees who ultimately show resilience and struggle to cope with the harsh realities of the gulags.

1.1 Thesis Statement

Yakhina's and Sepetys' novels portray the Soviet Gulags as heterotopic spaces where state power and individual resistance intersect, and through cultural representations of trauma, survival, and community, viewed through the lenses of Foucault, Stuart Hall, and Agier that challenge singular narratives of Soviet repression and reveal the complex human dimensions of carceral life.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

1. To investigate how Gulags function as heterotopia and shape characters' identities within the selected texts.
2. To evaluate how shared experiences of oppression and resistance foster a sense of community and collective identity among the characters.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What do the contradictions and complexities in the portrayal of Gulags as heterotopic spaces reveal about the interplay between state control and individual identity in the selected texts?
2. How do acts of struggle and resistance against internment within the Gulags contribute to forming new communities in the selected texts?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it explores the under-explored concept of heterotopia in the context of the Gulag system, specifically through the literary analysis of *Zuleikha* (2019) by Guzel Yakhina and *Between Shades of Gray* (2011) by Ruta Sepetys. By examining Gulags as heterotopic spaces, this research deepens the understanding of how forced displacement and confinement shape spatial, social, and psychological experiences in literature.

Beyond historical documentation, this study contributes to literary studies by analyzing how literature portrays the intersection of identity formation, power dynamics, and community-building within oppressive spaces. It highlights how forced

labour camps function as transformative sites where individuals navigate exile, resist dehumanization, and construct new forms of solidarity. Through this, the research offers insights into how literature represents survival, adaptation, and the fluid nature of identity under coercion.

Additionally, this study engages with broader historical and sociological perspectives by giving voice to marginalized narratives and challenging dominant portrayals of internment. It examines spaces of confinement not just as sites of suffering but as arenas where agency, cultural resilience, and acts of defiance emerge. Furthermore, it critically reflects on the role of authority in creating exclusionary spaces that marginalize and control specific groups within society.

1.5 Delimitation of the Study

This study is delimited to exploring the concept of heterotopia in two specific novels: *Zuleikha* (2019) by Guzel Yakhina and *Between Shades of Gray* (2011) by Ruta Sepetys. The study's focus is delimited to examining the Gulags as heterotopic spaces and its effects on identity formation, struggle, resistance, and community building between the internees. The analysis will be grounded in the theoretical framework of heterotopia as articulated by Michel Foucault and Michel Agier. It will not extend to other forms of internment or displacement outside the specific historical and cultural context of the Soviet Gulags.

1.6 Limitation of the Study

This study has limitations. It only analyzes two literary works that may limit the generalization of the findings. Other texts depicting Gulag experiences might offer different insights or highlight other aspects not covered in these novels. The focus on the theory of heterotopia may only encompass some dimensions of the characters' experiences. Other theoretical perspectives could provide different interpretations and broader understandings.

1.7 Organization of the Study

The research is divided into five chapters addressing the research questions and objectives.

1. Introduction

It introduces the study, providing background information on the Gulag system, the concept of heterotopia, and the selected texts. It mentions the research problem, objectives, and significance. It also provides the research objectives, research questions and an overview of the thesis structure.

2. Review of Literature

This chapter reviews existing literature on the theory of heterotopia, the historical context of the Gulags, and previous studies on *BSOG* (2011) and *ZOHE* (2019). It also identifies gaps in the current research that this study aims to fill.

3. Theoretical Framework

It explains Michel Foucault's and Michel Agier's concepts of heterotopia and its relevance to the study. It also discusses Alexander Solzhenitsyn's non-fictional work to discuss the themes of identity formation, struggle, and resistance.

4. Analysis

This chapter examines how the Gulags are depicted as a heterotopic space in Yakhina's and Sepetys's novels. It also analyses the impact of internment on the characters' identities and

5. Analysis

This chapter explores the acts of resistance and formation of new communities within the Gulag setting.

6. Conclusion

This chapter summarises the study's key findings. It concludes my research and provides recommendations for further research in the future.

1.8 Operational Definitions

Some of the important concepts are listed below:

Heterotopia:

Heterotopia is a concept coined by the philosopher Michel Foucault to describe spaces that are seen as 'other'. Heterotopias are worlds within worlds, mirroring and yet upsetting what is outside. This concept was further expanded by

Michel Agier who observes these places as places where individuals negotiate their identities and create meaningful worlds.

Internment:

Internment means keeping people in prison or camps without a fair trial. It can lead to human rights violations and raise concerns about fairness and justice.

Gulags:

The Gulag system refers to the network of forced labor camps established in the Soviet Union from the 1920s to the 1950s, primarily under Joseph Stalin's rule.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter analyzes relevant literature to show how previous studies have worked on the themes of Gulags, the theory of heterotopia, and the selected novels. The review is structured thematically to provide a more analytical and comparative discussion.

The first section examines literature on Gulags, exploring historical and literary perspectives on these forced labor camps and their representation in narratives of oppression and survival. The second section focuses on works related to Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia, considering how this theoretical framework has been applied to spaces of confinement and displacement. The third and fourth sections engage with scholarship on *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes* (2019) and *Between Shades of Gray* (2011), analyzing how these novels depict internment, exile, and resilience. Through this discussion, the chapter aims to identify gaps in the existing research, ultimately positioning this study as a necessary intervention in the ongoing discourse on Gulags and heterotopic spaces.

2.1 Literature on Gulags

The study of Gulags is essential in understanding the places of repression and control within the Soviet Union. Scholars have talked various aspects different aspects of Gulag life. The wide range of literature on this topic highlights both historical accounts and contemporary analyses, providing insight into how these forced labor camps shaped not only individual lives but also the social and economic landscape of the Soviet Union.

The way Gulag stories were told and received was heavily influenced by the Cold War climate of the 1950s and 1960s. In the West, accounts of Soviet repression were often highlighted within a political atmosphere that was deeply critical of Russia, serving as part of a larger ideological struggle between the United States and the USSR. In contrast, within the Soviet Union, these same stories were suppressed or reshaped to fit the state's narrative. This historical context helps explain how the

novels resonate both as records of personal suffering and as reflections of the political climate in which such stories gained attention.

One significant contribution to the scholarship on Gulag experiences is Elaine MacKinnon's article "Motherhood and Survival in the Stalinist Gulag." Drawing on the memoirs of four women—Olga Adamova-Sliozberg, Liudmila Miklashevskaja, Nadezhda Joffe, and Valentina Ievleva-Pavlenko—MacKinnon foregrounds the deeply gendered dimension of repression. She argues that maternal identity operated in paradoxical ways: while separation from children produced what she calls "stabbing pain in the heart" and an unrelenting sense of loss, the same bond often became the strongest impetus to survive (13). For example, Liudmila Miklashevskaja's promise to her daughter—"I give you my word that I will return"—functioned as a covenant that sustained her through years of incarceration (14). MacKinnon further emphasizes that letters from children could be "more precious than bread," underscoring how fragments of maternal connection replaced even the most basic needs (14). By treating these women's memoirs as "forms of protest and social therapy" (20), MacKinnon demonstrates how personal narratives not only preserved memory but also resisted the erasure of maternal suffering from the collective history of the camps.

Anne Applebaum's *Gulag: A History* brings the Soviet labor camp system into painfully human focus. While she carefully traces its rise, operation, and decline, her work is most powerful in showing what daily survival meant for those inside. Prisoners endured exhausting labor, frigid barracks, and rations so meagre that hunger became the defining rhythm of existence. As one survivor, Lidiya Ginzburg, recalled, the "most desperate and tormenting thing of all" was watching food "draw to an end with awful rapidity without bringing satiety." Applebaum uses such testimonies to argue that the Gulag was never a machine of progress but rather a system of waste—squandering both economic potential and countless human lives. Echoing Anton Chekhov's earlier condemnation that Russia had "allowed millions of people to rot in prisons . . . in a barbarous manner," her account exposes how repression was normalized and excused. By interweaving archival records with voices of those who starved, froze, and mourned within camp walls, Applebaum refuses to let the Gulag

be reduced to statistics; instead, she restores its history to the people who bore it in their bodies.

Michael P. Gallen's "The Economics of the Gulag" examines the camps not only as sites of repression but as failed engines of economic growth. Stalin's regime promoted them as a solution to labor shortages, claiming that places of confinement could "assist those economic enterprises which experience labor shortages" (First All-Union Conference, 1929). Yet, as Gallen shows, the system was riddled with absurd inefficiencies—tractors "sent, but no oil," or an imported transformer left idle for years because "no one has been able to figure out what it is for" (Ivanova). Echoing Applebaum's conclusion that Gulag production figures were "meaningless," he argues that low productivity, high mortality, and acts of resistance such as sabotage ensured that forced labor served control more than economic progress. Shalamov's image of convicts lighting a stolen charge—"Zap!—fingers fly everywhere"—captures the futility and quiet defiance that defined this coerced labor system.

A different perspective is presented in the study "Stalin and the Origins of Mistrust," which explores the long-term effects of Gulag policies on institutional trust within post-Soviet states. The authors explore how years of forced labor camps, state surveillance, and political purges damaged social cohesion, leading to everlasting mistrust among citizens. This study is particularly relevant as it connects historical repression to contemporary issues of governance and social stability in Russia and other former Soviet territories (Nikolova, Popova, and Otrachshenko).

Jakub Lonsky's study demonstrates how the Soviet Gulag system served not only as a penal institution but also as the birthplace of enduring criminal networks. He shows that "the Russian mafia originated in the Gulag – the Soviet system of forced labor camps which housed around 18 million prisoners in the 1920s–1950s" (Lonsky 3), with early vory-v-zakone closely tied to camp life (14). Even after the camps closed, "50% of vory lived within 32 km of the nearest gulag" (15), illustrating the persistence of these networks. Communities with mafia presence "experienced a dramatic rise in crime driven by turf wars... in the 1990s" (3), with attacks largely targeting businessmen, fellow criminals, and law enforcement rather than politicians due to "widespread collusion between vory and local politicians" (25). By tracing mafia roots to the Gulag and their long-term impact, Lonsky highlights how "the roots

of a mafia-type group can also be traced back to the period of a strong totalitarian state” (27), underscoring the unintended legacy of repression in generating alternative power structures.

While many studies focus on the experiences of prisoners, Golfo Alexopoulos' *Amnesty 1945: The Revolving Door of Stalin's Gulag* examines the impact of large-scale amnesties on Soviet society. She challenges the notion of the Gulag as a rigid, static institution by showing how mass releases of prisoners created instability and blurred the boundaries between incarceration and freedom. Her study of Stalin's 1945 amnesty, which saw over half a million prisoners released, reveals the cyclical nature of repression, where individuals were often re-arrested or continued to be monitored despite being officially freed. By shifting the focus to post-Gulag reintegration, Alexopoulos adds another layer to the understanding of Soviet penal policies and their broader implications.

Similarly, Tatiana Mikhailova's work highlights the long-term demographic and economic consequences of the Gulag system, contrasting it with the short-lived effects of World War II. She demonstrates that the “presence of a Gulag labor camp nearby is a strong predictor of future population growth in Soviet cities” (1), noting that camps “have a long-lasting (in some cases permanent) effect on the city size” (1). In contrast, the impact of wartime shocks such as evacuations or occupation “diminishes with time and disappears after 20–25 years” (5). Mikhailova attributes the persistence of Gulag effects to state-led industrialization, as “camps that were specialized in industrial production... were in many ways creating this coveted ‘eastern industrial base’ of the Soviet Union” (19). Thus, while WWII disruptions proved temporary, the Gulag functioned as a tool of regional policy that reshaped the Soviet spatial economy, embedding industrial centers where they “would hardly emerge as the result of free migration” (5).

A particularly insightful contribution to Gulag literature comes from Magdalena Ruta's article “The Gulag of Poets: The Experience of Exile, Forced Labour Camps, and Wandering in the USSR in the Works of Polish-Yiddish Writers (1939–1949).” Ruta explores how Polish-Yiddish authors who survived in the Gulags narrated their experiences through literature, often focusing on themes of exile, loss, and resilience. She examines how their works serve as both personal stories and

historical records, preserving the voices of those who might otherwise be forgotten by the future generations. Her analysis reveals the emotional toll of forced displacement, showing how literature can function as both a form of mourning and a means of resistance against oppressive regimes.

2.2 Works Related to the Theory of Heterotopia

In the article “Heterotopia and its Role in the Lived Experiences of Resettlement,” the author draws on Foucault’s (1986) notion of heterotopia as “counter-sites” that exist outside typical social settings and are capable of contrasting various purposes and meanings. Traditionally applied to spaces such as gardens, prisons, cemeteries, and museums, this concept has also been fruitfully employed to understand the experiences of migration and resettlement. In this context, heterotopias are seen as spaces where immigrants can forge new places of belonging in host countries. These spaces allow them to navigate their resettlement journeys, weaving their personal narratives of displacement, arrival, and adaptation. Additionally, heterotopia has been applied to the role of art and culture in migration, offering a nuanced framework for understanding how immigrants construct belonging and negotiate identity within new sociocultural landscapes.

Lesley Gourlay, in “Open Education as a ‘Heterotopia of Desire’,” extends the concept of heterotopia into the realm of education, particularly focusing on the notion of openness. Gourlay critiques the dominant narrative of open education for often overlooking the diverse experiences of learners and reinforcing pre-existing power structures. Drawing from her longitudinal research on how students and faculty engage with educational technology, Gourlay uses Foucault’s heterotopia to question the neutrality of openness and the socio-material dimensions shaping digital learning environments. She argues that while open access to technology and resources may appear egalitarian, it can subtly perpetuate neoliberal agendas and obscure deeper inequalities. Her findings reveal that digital tools impact users' creativity and agency in complex ways, shaped by institutional and material contexts. However, Gourlay’s study has limitations, notably its narrow focus on a specific academic demographic, which may limit the generalizability of her findings.

In *Social Media as Heterotopia* (2020), Lee and Wei extend Foucault’s notion of heterotopia, described as spaces “which draw us out of ourselves... the space that

torments and consumes” (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986), to digital platforms. They argue that curated profiles, where users “carefully curate their images” (Zhao et al., 2013), throwbacks that accumulate time like “museums or exhibition spaces,” and live features that create “a new heterotopia” of escape, reflect key heterotopian principles of temporality, performance, and selective boundaries. Drawing on Boyd’s (2012) idea of “networked publics,” they highlight affordances such as persistence, scalability, and searchability that make social media function like public space. While offering valuable design implications around privacy, audiences, and curation, the study remains exploratory and limited in scope (Kim and Kang 9–22).

Sudradjat’s article “Foucault, the Other Spaces, and Human Behaviour” offers a comprehensive examination of heterotopia and its implications for urban design and human behavior. He presents heterotopias as spaces of deviation and transformation that challenge the traditional understanding of spatial organization. Through examples such as clinics, boarding schools, and prisons, the article illustrates how these spaces reflect and influence shifts in societal norms, values, and power dynamics. Sudradjat stresses that heterotopias serve as active sites that mold both individual and collective behaviors, making them critical to modern urban thinking. He suggests that applying Foucault’s spatial theory to urban planning can lead to more inclusive, culturally nuanced environments. This perspective broadens the scope of heterotopia, positioning it as a key theoretical tool in reimagining the relationship between space, power, and social practice (Sudradjat).

Frances Bell’s “(Dis)connective Practice in Heterotopic Spaces for Networked and Connected Learning” explores how students and teachers use social networking sites (SNS) in open and connected learning environments. The article discusses the idea of Disconnective Practice by Light, which focuses on how people sometimes choose to disconnect or set boundaries while using online platforms. This helps them manage their time, energy, and privacy. Bell also uses Foucault’s idea of heterotopia to describe how online spaces like SNS are different from regular learning spaces. These platforms mix public and private, formal and informal, and real and virtual experiences, which can affect how students interact and learn. The article explains that students don’t always want to stay connected all the time—sometimes they need space to think, reflect, or protect their privacy. Bell’s study shows that learning online

is more complicated than just being open and connected, and that disconnection can be just as important. However, her research mainly focuses on university students in Western settings, which leaves out how learners from different backgrounds—like younger students, those with limited internet access, or students from non-Western countries—experience these online learning spaces. More research is needed to understand how different groups of learners deal with the challenges of openness and disconnection in digital education.

Building on these previous studies of heterotopic spaces in education, migration, and digital environments, my research shifts the focus to Gulags as heterotopias of internment and displacement. Unlike earlier works that examine learning practices, cultural belonging, or online engagement, my study explores how the harsh and controlled environment of the Gulags shaped prisoners' identities, social bonds, and psychological resilience. By highlighting the lived experiences within these carceral spaces, my research adds a unique perspective to the broader conversation on heterotopia, emphasizing its role in spaces marked by suffering, survival, and unexpected forms of community.

2.3 Works Related to *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes* (2019)

Iakovleva Elena, in her article "Interpretation of Symbols of Female Destiny in the Novel *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes* by G. Yakhina", explores the portrayal of Tatar women through the lens of literary realism. She uses a hermeneutical method to analyze symbolic elements in the novel that reveal the hidden dimensions of Tatar women's lives. The study emphasizes how historical transformations and sociocultural shifts have contributed to their evolving identities, providing them with avenues for self-realization and independence. Her work offers valuable insights into the personal and societal changes that shape the destinies of women in the Tatar community, but it remains focused mainly on the symbolism attached to gender roles and does not address the broader context of forced exile and imprisonment that also plays a central role in the novel.

Bruffaerts and Lievois, in their article "Specific Features of Russian Language Varieties in *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes* by G. Yakhina", investigate how the novel's culturally rich and socially marked language is translated into French and Dutch. They explore five translation techniques—sociolinguistic equivalence, partial

equivalence, standardization, calque, and adaptation—used to express prehistoric vocabulary, prison slang, and regional dialects. The research shows that partial equivalence is the most frequently employed strategy, particularly in the French translation, reflecting the complex task of conveying nuanced, context-specific language into other linguistic and cultural frameworks. This study is helpful in understanding how language carries cultural weight, but it centers on translation practices rather than the thematic and psychological layers of life in the labor camps.

Bukareva and Shushkova's article "Interpretation of the Story about Yuzuf and Zuleikha in the Novel *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes* by G. Yakhina" examines how the novel reworks a famous narrative from Eastern literature. By comparing Yakhina's story to A. Jami's traditional version of the Yuzuf and Zuleikha tale, the authors argue that the novel shifts the theme from romantic to parental love. This reinterpretation gives depth to the emotional development of the main character and connects Eastern storytelling traditions with modern narratives of resilience and maternal strength. While the article provides a rich literary and cultural comparison, its focus remains symbolic and metaphorical, overlooking the political and spatial realities of Zuleikha's exile in the Gulag.

In "*Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes* in (Post-) Colonial Russia", Kravtsova offers a post- and decolonial critique of the novel, discussing its reception in both Russia and Tatarstan. She challenges the idea that the novel is purely a postcolonial text, arguing instead that it supports Russian neo-imperialist ideologies by presenting Zuleikha's "deislamization" as a form of emancipation. According to Kravtsova, the novel glosses over the complex realities of religious and ethnic identity, reducing the protagonist's cultural detachment to an empowering transformation. Her analysis adds a critical political perspective to the discussion, but it focuses largely on the ideological framing of the narrative and not on the Gulag as a heterotopic space where identity is reshaped through experiences of displacement and survival.

Dolgov, in his article "Elements of the Language Code in the Poetics of Guzel Yakhina's Novel *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes*", explores the influence of Slavic pagan beliefs, folk demonology, and nature-based mythology on the novel's language and structure. He points out how images of rivers, forests, and animals—especially zoonyms—are used to build the story's mood, characters, and themes. This approach

uncovers the deep symbolic layer of the novel and shows how traditional worldviews are embedded in its poetic elements. While this work highlights the artistic and cultural richness of the text, it does not examine the social or psychological consequences of the Gulag system, nor how the forced labor camp functions as a transformative and isolating space (Dolgov).

Although these studies examine *ZOHE* from various literary, cultural, and linguistic perspectives—ranging from symbolism and mythology to translation and postcolonial critique—they do not explore the Gulag as a heterotopic space or analyze the effects of forced displacement on personal and communal identity. The lived experiences within the Gulag, the psychological trauma endured by the characters, and the ways in which imprisonment reshapes notions of self and belonging remain largely unexplored. My research intends to address this gap by focusing on the Gulag as a site of internment and transformation, interpreting it through the lens of heterotopia to highlight how such spaces generate both suffering and unexpected forms of resilience and community.

2.4 Works Related to *Between Shades of Gray* (2011)

The aim of this article, “Coping with the Hardship of Life in Ruta Sepetys’ *Between Shades of Gray* (2011)” is to explore how the protagonist copes with the challenges of life and to evaluate the contribution of the plot, setting, and character in revealing effective coping mechanisms. This analysis draws on the concept of life instincts by Sigmund Freud and is supported by text-based and context-based interpretations. The findings indicate that the protagonist employs two key coping strategies: socializing with others and drawing as a form of self-expression (Gayatri and Ningsih). This research focuses on Sigmund Freud’s concept of life instincts, which tells about the coping mechanisms relating to everyday challenges in life. It highlights that socializing and drawing are two vital coping mechanisms.

This article “Bloodlands Fiction: Cultural Trauma Politics and the Memory of Soviet Atrocities in *Breaking Stalin’s Nose*, *A Winter’s Day* in 1939 and *Between Shades of Gray*” discusses the beginning of the field of trauma theory in the 1990s, which was initially ill-equipped to recognize the traumatic experiences of non-Western and postcolonial groups or nations. The postcolonial turn in history and memory studies challenged trauma theory to expand its focus to other literatures that

bear witness to the so-far neglected, minoritarian trauma traditions. The article introduces the recently emerged body of historical fiction about Soviet deportations, atrocities, genocide, and other forms of persecution in Eastern Europe between 1930 and the late 1950s, which the author calls “Bloodlands fiction”. The article argues for a more expansive model of trauma fiction that accommodates genres such as Bloodlands fiction and uses readings of works by diaspora authors to illustrate the key features, textual strategies, and cognitive effects of Bloodlands fiction as a genre of global trauma fiction. Readings of *Breaking Stalin’s Nose* (2013) by Russian American Eugene Yelchin, *A Winter’s Day in 1939* (2013) by Polish New Zealander Melinda Szymanik and *Between Shades of Gray* (2011) by Lithuanian American Ruta Sepetys are used to illustrate some of the critical features, textual strategies and cognitive effects of Bloodlands fiction as a genre of global trauma fiction (Oziewicz). This research builds an argument on the trauma theory and locates it in global trauma fiction. The researcher’s primary focus is on the postcolonial minority groups whose trauma was not recognized before and terms it to be a part of Bloodlands fiction.

2.5 Research Gap

The existing literature extensively explores the history, social impact, and economic significance of the Gulag system, along with its lasting effects on society. Scholars have also engaged with Foucault’s concept of heterotopia in various contexts, from migration to digital spaces. However, there remains a gap in analyzing Gulags as heterotopic spaces of internment and displacement, particularly in relation to literary portrayals. My research extends beyond economic and social factors by examining how Gulags function as sites of contested identities and resistance within literature. By analyzing *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes* (2019) and *Between Shades of Gray* (2011), this research investigates how the narratives reconstruct these spaces as sites of psychological and communal transformation. This study thus contributes to the field by bridging Foucault’s heterotopia with literary representations of forced displacement, offering a fresh perspective on how internment spaces shape identity and resistance in Gulag literature.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the researcher explores the theoretical framework and justifies the theoretical tools for analyzing the primary texts. Following the discussion of the theoretical framework, the researcher delves into the methodology on research. It offers a concise overview of key concepts such as heterotopia, Gulags, struggle, resistance and community formation to substantiate the rationale behind incorporating these theoretical elements in my study.

3.1 Research Design

The research uses the textual analysis method by Stuart Hall. The theoretical concept of heterotopia given by Michel Foucault and Michel Agier are used to explore the Gulags as heterotopias in the selected texts.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

Michel Foucault gave the concept of heterotopia in his lecture “Of Other Spaces” which was further developed by Michel Agier in his works. Foucault, in his work “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias” translated by Jay Miskowiec, says, “There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilisation, real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society— which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (Foucault 3).

3.3 Key Principles of Heterotopia

1. Crisis and Deviation: Heterotopias can be places for individuals at a significant life change or transition such as adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly in a state of crisis. He gives example of a boarding school or military service where young boys experience adulthood away from home. He says that crisis heterotopias are disappearing and are being replaced by heterotopia of deviation that are places for those who

deviate from societal norms and don't fit in the society. (e.g., psychiatric hospitals for mentally ill, prisons for criminals) (Foucault, 1967).

2. **Functionality Changes Over Time:** The function of a heterotopia can change over time, showing a shift in societal norms and values. For example, a cemetery's importance and structure evolves over time. A cemetery was a place where people's relatives are buried. With time its purpose changed, until the end of 18th century, there was a hierarchy of tombs such as the charnel house specifically for the bodies who lost traces of individuality, there were also individual tombs and some existed inside the church. But with time when people start to believe the concept of resurrection and immortality of the soul, they stopped focusing on the physical remains. And, with the passage of time, the cemetery was shifted to the outskirts of the city like another city where the dead were buried (Foucault, 1967).
3. **The Juxtaposition of Incompatible Spaces:** Heterotopias juxtapose several incompatible spaces or sites in a single real place. An example is theatre, which combines scenes and narratives within a confined space. Another example is of a cinema where different three-dimensional movies are shown on a two-dimensional screen. He also gives an example of a Persian garden which had a fountain or basin in the middle that marked as a sacred place and its four sides symbolized the four sides of the world. The different plants in the garden created a miniature version of the universe, a microcosm (Foucault, 1967).
4. **Connection to Temporalities:** Heterotopias are linked to different perceptions of time. He talks about slices in time naming them as heterochronies. These are time periods that are different from usual flow of life. He gives the example of the cemetery that marks the time between life and death. It is a state of quasi-eternity where a person totally disappears. He also mentions museums and libraries that trap the time by preserving objects and knowledge from different eras. Similarly, universal archives create a timeless repository that have no effect of time on it. In contrast, he talks about the transitory time giving an example of the fairgrounds and festivals that are not meant to last forever. Also, vacation villages that are places for temporary escape. He says

that these two form can come together to give an experience of both temporality and timelessness. (Foucault, 1967).

5. **System of Opening and Closing:** Access to heterotopias is often controlled, requiring special permissions or rituals. This regulation of entry and exit makes it different from everyday spaces. Such as prisons require permission and have rules for entry. Also, Muslim Hammams and Scandinavian saunas require purification rituals to entry. He says that there are places that give illusion of open access such as farm bedrooms in Brazil that any traveler can enter but that are actually separate from the family's actual living space. (Foucault, 1967).
6. **Function in Relation to Surrounding Space:** Heterotopias either create spaces of illusion that expose every real space as even more illusory such as brothels made the everyday life seem illusory with all its constraints or they create other natural spaces that are perfect which create an image of the ordinary spaces to appear as messy. He gave the example of Puritan society and Jesuit colonies in South America that created a perfect system with strict patterns and tasks were carried out with the church bells (Foucault, 1967).

3.4 Introduction to Michel Agier's Perspective on Heterotopia

Michel Agier, an anthropologist, builds on Foucault's concept of heterotopia by applying it to contemporary spaces marked by displacement and marginalisation, such as refugee camps and urban peripheries (Agier, 2011). Agier's work focuses on how these spaces serve as sites of exclusion and possibility.

Moreover, Agier says that heterotopias come in various types, such as locations for passing through (like airports or train stations), places for containment (like prisons or refugee camps), and spaces for exceptional circumstances (like diplomatic enclaves or military bases). These areas are commonly created to exercise authority and can be cut off from the broader community through psychological or physical means. Agier states that in "modern heterotopia, there are three key figures: prisons, psychiatric hospitals, and migrants. The initial concept in this scenario is incarceration, serving as a drastic and contradictory extreme in terms of the goals and methods of isolating unwanted individuals" (Agier 280).

3.4.1 Key Aspects of Agier's Interpretation

1. Spaces of Exile and Refuge: Agier sees refugee camps, borders, places of internment and urban ghettos as modern heterotopias that are “precarious spaces to which populations with uncertain futures are relegated” (265). These spaces reflect and resist the conditions that created them (Agier, 2011). He says the world's displaced population dwells in an ‘ensemble of margins and precarious spaces’, which he calls ‘heterotopies’ (Agier 2018).
2. Liminality and Ambiguity: Agier emphasises the liminal nature of these spaces, existing on the thresholds between different social, legal, and political realms. They are neither fully inside nor outside the normative structures of society (Agier, 2008). Agier claims “These ‘off-places’ ... form first as places ‘outside,’ locations on the edges or limits of the normal order of things. This characteristic confinement gives them a certain extraterritoriality. This extraterritoriality takes shape for refugees and displaced persons in the experience of a double locality exclusion: They are excluded from the native places they lost through displacement, and they are excluded from the space of the ‘local population’ where the camps or other transit zones are located” (Agier).
3. Identity and Community Formation: Within these heterotopias, individuals and groups negotiate their identities and form new communities. These processes are shaped by the tension between isolation and interaction with the broader society (Agier, 2011). Agier says “I am looking to give an account of the social creations, cultural changes and possibly new political forms that appear when people gather together for an indefinite time in a given space” (274).
4. Resistance and Agency: Agier highlights the agency of people living in heterotopias, focusing on their strategies of resistance and adaptation. Despite the constraints, these spaces can become sites of cultural production and political activism (Agier, 2019).
5. Critical Examination of Humanitarianism: Agier critically examines the role of humanitarian organisations in managing these spaces. He mentions how interventions can help and hinder displaced populations’ self-determination.

6. Temporal and Spatial Dynamics: Agier's perspective shows the fluid nature of heterotopias, that are continuously reshaped by outside forces and internal developments (Agier, 2014).

By using Foucault's ideas with his own findings, Agier says heterotopias are complex, contested spaces that show a lot about the human condition. His work helps in analysing global phenomena such as migration, urbanisation, and social marginalisation.

This research uses Michel Foucault's theory of heterotopia and Michel Agier's concept of displacement as the primary theoretical frameworks to examine how the Gulags function as heterotopic spaces in *Between Shades of Gray* by Ruta Sepetys and *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes* by Guzel Yakhina.

The research will critically engage with the following principles of heterotopia, as defined by Foucault and Agier:

1. Heterotopia of Crisis and Deviation
2. Heterotopia of Emplacement and Displacement
3. Heterotopia of Juxtaposition
4. Heterotopia of Time
5. Heterotopia of Opening and Closing
6. Heterotopia of Illusion and Compensation

Each principle will be explored through a specific thematic focus, which is represented in the following subheadings for analysis:

1. Exile, Deviation, and the Reinvention of Space – Under this heading, I explore how the Gulags as spaces of exile and deviation force individuals to reconsider their notions of home and belonging.
2. Exile, Displacement, and the Reimagining of Space in the Gulags – I explore how the Gulags can work as spaces of displacement, and how prisoners reconstruct their environments to survive.
3. Resistance and the Formation of Counter-Cultures within the Gulags – I investigate how prisoners create counter-cultures and resist the Soviet regime that seeks to control them.

4. Time, Memory, and the Disruption of Narrative – I analyze the role of time and memory in distorting traditional narratives, and how they shape the Gulag experience.
5. Openings, Closures, and the Politics of Freedom – I explore the controlled access and restrictions within the Gulag spaces and how the internees resist such spaces.
6. Imagined Worlds: Illusion, Hope, and Survival – I examine how the Gulags serve as spaces of illusion, and how hope and survival seeps through in such harsh environments.

By applying Foucault's heterotopia and Agier's displacement theory to these thematic subheadings, the study will explore how the Gulags, work as sites of trauma, resistance, and cultural formation.

The research further expands on these encounters by using Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's work *The Gulag Archipelago* (1918-1956), which narrates real-life experiences. Solzhenitsyn talks about his time in the Gulag and detailed discussions with his fellow survivors tell the harsh realities of the Gulags. This theoretical framework offers a useful perspective for examining the two novels by highlighting how they depict heterotopic spaces, criticize oppressive power structures, and show the challenges characters face in resisting those structures.

3.5 Research Method

This study uses a qualitative research design to analyze the selected texts, *ZOHE* (2019) and *BSOG* (2011), with a focus on how Gulags function as heterotopic spaces. It involves Foucault's and Agier's theories of heterotopia with Stuart Hall's cultural analysis framework to examine how meaning is produced, negotiated, and contested within these narratives.

Stuart Hall's approach to textual analysis is useful to this study because it stresses that meaning is not inherent in a text but is shaped by historical, cultural, and ideological contexts. Rather than applying a rigid methodological framework, this study draws on Hall's key principles to explore representations of internment, displacement, and resistance within the selected texts. The following elements guide the analysis:

1. Selection of Texts

The selected texts, *ZOHE* and *BSOG*, have been selected for their thematic exploration of internment, forced displacement, resistance, identity formation, and survival within the context of the Soviet Gulag system. These texts not only depict the traumatic realities of Gulag internment but also point to how these spaces function as sites of power, resistance, and identity negotiation.

2. Historical and Cultural Context

This section will examine how historical realities, such as the operation of the Gulags and violence, influence the fictionalized portrayal of internment, displacement, and survival. By understanding the socio-political environment, the study investigates the impact of historical events on the identities of the internees.

3. Representation, Ideology, and Power Structures

This section focuses on how the texts engage with power structures, ideological narratives, and mechanisms of state control embedded within the Gulag system. The study assesses how these texts challenge or reinforce the dominant historical accounts of the Gulags, particularly in their portrayal of power dynamics, identity, and resistance.

4. Spatial Analysis: Heterotopia in Practice

The study employs Foucault's six principles of heterotopia, combined with Agier's concept of heterotopia, to examine how the Gulags are represented as heterotopic spaces in the selected texts. This critical spatial analysis is not merely an application of theoretical concepts but seeks to investigate the complexities and contradictions inherent in the Gulag as a heterotopic space.

Key elements include:

1. Heterotopias of Crisis and Deviation: Analyzing the Gulag as a site where prisoners, as social outcasts, experience forced marginalization.
2. Heterotopias of Emplacement and Displacement: Examining the simultaneous processes of forced relocation and confinement, and how these spaces evolve over time.

3. **Heterotopias of Juxtaposition:** Investigating how contradictory forces—such as suffering and resilience—coexist within the same space, and how these contradictions shape the experience of internment.
4. **Heterotopias of Time:** Analyzing the disruption of time (past, present, future) within the Gulag and how time functions as a tool of psychological control.
5. **Heterotopias of Opening and Closing:** Examining access and exclusion within spaces of power, including the role of gates, barriers, and rituals of entrance that determine who can enter or escape the Gulag.
6. **Heterotopias of Illusion and Compensation:** Exploring the Gulags as both sites of oppressive control and imagined spaces of resistance or survival, and how these illusions play a role in coping mechanisms.

5. Resistance, Struggle, and Negotiated Meanings

Building on Stuart Hall's theory of representation and negotiated meanings, this section investigates how prisoners resist, subvert, and reinterpret the meanings imposed upon them by the state. The analysis considers various forms of resistance—ranging from silent defiance and memory-keeping to direct action and rebellion—and how these acts challenge official narratives of the Gulag system. By focusing on the personal and collective struggles for meaning-making, the study reveals how prisoners create alternative narratives of survival, identity, and freedom within the confines of the Gulag.

6. Intersectionality and Identity Formation

This section explores the intersection of class, gender, race, and nationality in shaping the experiences of characters within the Gulag system. The study examines how these intersecting factors influence the prisoners' social positioning, survival strategies, and internal hierarchies within the Gulag. By analyzing the experiences of different groups, the research highlights how these categories of identity inform the formation of both individual and collective identity in a context of forced internment and displacement.

7. Reflections on Meaning-Making and Interpretation

Finally, the research reflects on how the selected texts construct and challenge dominant understandings of internment, displacement, and resistance. This analysis

will highlight how these works explore the Gulag system, challenging readers to rethink their perceptions of power, resistance, and survival. The section also considers the broader cultural and historical implications of the Gulag as a heterotopic space, exploring how the texts contribute to ongoing discussions in literary studies, memory studies, and historical trauma.

CHAPTER 4

CONTESTED SPACES: HETEROTOPIA AND STATE POWER IN THE SOVIET GULAGS

In this chapter, a detailed analysis of the chosen novels is presented to better understand how internment and displacement are shown within the Gulags and to explore these camps as heterotopic spaces. The analysis uses Foucault and Agier's theory of heterotopia, along with insights from Alexander Solzhenitsyn's non-fiction work *The Gulag Archipelago* (1975), which reflects real-life encounters in the Gulags. This part focuses on *Between Shades of Gray* (2011) and *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes* (2019), applying the principles of heterotopia to highlight the unique environments created within these camps.

Solzhenitsyn, himself a survivor of the Gulags, writes, "I dedicate this to all those who did not live to tell it. And may they please forgive me for not having seen it all, nor remembered it all, for not having divined all of it" (*The Gulag Archipelago*). His work helps support this study by offering firsthand experiences of suffering and survival in the Gulags, adding depth and authenticity to the fictional portrayals discussed.

4.1 Exile, Deviation, and the Reinvention of Space

According to Agier's concept of the border places and camps as "liminal zones", the gulag is a space that works as a transitional space where the individuals undergo transformation by being removed from their social roles and fitting into a new role as designated by the Soviet policy. In these spaces of crisis and deviation they have to conform to their new roles in order to survive. The change of these roles is perfectly described by Alexander Solzhenitsyn in his book *TGA* (1975) while explaining the process of arrests,

You are arrested by a religious pilgrim whom you have put up for the night "for the sake of C." You are arrested by a meterman who has come to read your electric meter. You are arrested by a bicyclist who has run into you on the street, by a railway conductor, a taxi driver, a savings bank teller, the

manager of a movie theater. Anyone of them can arrest you, and you notice the concealed maroon-colored identification card only when it is too late (5).

These people were the informants and the instruments of the Soviet state who moved from being an ordinary citizen to an agent of the state, showing a shift that involved a change in identity and social role. The individuals are in a liminal space where they negotiate their identities and are bound to adapt the changing conditions in the Gulags for example, in *BSOG* (2011) people were assigned roles as laborers that were totally different from those before coming to the Gulags. The individuals are in a "liminal zone" of the gulag where they are in an in-between state. They are neither fitting in their previous roles nor in the new ones.

Lina Vikas who is a fifteen year old girl, is deported to the Gulags along with her family because the entire family is labeled as criminals as her father Kostas is accused of helping his relatives in Germany. Lina is passionate about drawing and is about to get admitted to an art school but before this can happen, she is deported to the labour camps. Here, in the camps she shifts to a new role as a labourer who works in the beetroot collective farm.

Lina's mother Elena Vikas is a well-educated woman and she is fluent in Russian. Her role shifts from being a housewife to a translator when the authorities ask her to help in communicating between the NKVD (which is the secret police and interior ministry of the Soviet Union during the Stalinist era) and the deportees as Elena says, "they want me to work for them ... Translating documents and speaking with the other Lithuanians who are here" (Sepetys 114). Elena was also working as a labourer just like her daughter along with the other prisoners.

Another important character is Mrs. Arvydas, her role is not specifically laid out so we can assume that she was an housewife. When she arrives at the Gulags, her role shifts from being a housewife to being a prostitute. She agrees to sleep with the NKVD officers just to save her son's life as Lina mentions that "Mrs. Arvydas appeared in the window carrying a tray of glasses. Her hair was clean and styled. Her clothes were pressed. She was wearing makeup. She smiled and distributed the drinks to the NKVD" (154). Lina suspects that she and her son are working with the NKVD later her son clears her suspicion by telling Lina, "How do you think my father would

feel if he knew? How does my mother feel, lying with the men who murdered her husband?" (Sepetys 159).

Mrs. Arvydas shifted to this role to keep her son well fed, clothed, and sheltered. The shifting of roles within the Gulags sheds light on the impact of experiences of displacement and internment. These individuals were stripped of their past lives and are forced to redefine themselves in these spaces of crisis and deviation. Individuals constantly negotiate their identities to strive in the Gulags. This transformation and transition in the Gulags make them heterotopic spaces.

Heterotopias of crisis are said to be temporary solutions but mostly they are prolonged. Individuals spend years and even decades in these places. Heterotopias of crisis are also places where individuals who are in the state of a crisis reside, e.g. adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly, etc. According to Achille Mbembe, "Under conditions of necropolitics, entire populations are kept alive but in a state of death-in-life." (Necropolitics, 2019, p. 92). The states exercise power by deciding who lives and who dies, often through spaces like prisons, detention camps, or segregated zones.

These spaces of crisis were for people undergoing a transition in life. In *ZOHE* (2019), Zuleikha who is the protagonist of the story, is pregnant when she arrives in the gulag. She is transitioning to becoming a mother who would soon have a child. She transitions from an expecting mother to a woman with a child who navigates herself facing the harsh realities of the Gulags. Agier says that we should see these spaces "according to the de-centering approach" and "grasp the transformative power that emanates from them" (278). Initially, Zuleikha was a meek house wife who used to take care of her mother-in-law the "Vampire Hag" and Murtaza her husband as Yakhina writes,

Zuleikha is supposed to jump at her mother-in-law's call, then empty and carefully wash out the precious vessel first thing, before she stokes the fire in the stove, makes the dough, and takes the cow out to the herd. Woe unto Zuleikha if she sleeps through the morning wake-up call. It's happened twice in fifteen years and she doesn't allow herself to recall the consequences. (5)

But in the Gulags, she transformed into a woman who actively participated in cooking, cleaning and hunting willingly as Yakina mentions,

She recently and suddenly grasped that it's good that fate has cast her here. She's taking shelter in a cubbyhole in a state-owned infirmary, living among people who aren't blood relations, speaking a language not native to her, hunting like a man, working enough for three, and she's doing fine. (380)

This shows that the Gulag as a space of crisis helps Zuleikha transforming into an individual who is independent and doesn't have to rely on Murtaza, her husband for the basic necessities. Also, Yuzuf who is Zuleikha's son goes through a period of transition in the Gulag. He is born in harsh conditions with little chances of survival due to malnutrition but is raised in the Gulag to be a young man. Yuzuf learns new things such as painting from Ikonnikov who is an artist and an intellectual person and when Ikonnikov leaves for war, he say "I'm leaving the artel to you" (450) as he has knowledge about painting and later worked in the Gulags as a painter. He also learns medical terms from Leibe who is a German doctor and a fellow prisoner as he "suspects that an interest in medicine has awakened in Yuzuf" (Yakhina 398). Yuzuf learns new words from Izabella who is a professor as she "always pronounces new words so calmy and distinctily that they etch themselves in Yuzuf's memory" (Yakhina 397). He turns out to be a young man who transitions to be intellectual and smart. He goes through a transition with time even though the conditions are not ideal.

Both historical records and fictional depictions of the Gulags are shaped by propaganda. The Soviet state presented the Gulags as "corrective labour" institutions that served a greater social purpose, hiding the harsh realities inside them. In the West—especially during the Cold War—these camps were often portrayed as symbols of totalitarian cruelty, sometimes oversimplifying the complex human experiences within. Reading *BSOG* and *ZOHE* through this lens means paying attention to where the narratives challenge, align with, or draw from these competing portrayals.

Agier suggests these places have a transformative power, hence the characters undergo transformations and go through different levels of transitions; one from the past to present life in the Gulags and the other is maturation in the Gulags which includes several development stages such as infancy, childhood and young adulthood etc. These transitions involve significant physical, emotional, social and cognitive changes. These transitions redefine the roles of individuals in the Gulags. These

transitions show the resilience and adaptability of individuals in the face of adversity. The Gulags therefore become spaces of transition and transformation where the individuals reconstruct their identities.

According to Foucault, the heterotopic spaces exist outside the norm and are deviant from actual living spaces, they are isolated and build far away from the society. In *BSOG* (2011), the shacks in the Gulags are these outside spaces that are deviant and unlike the real home of the internees. The location, structure and arrangement makes these shacks an outside unconventional place that represents a deviation from the normal and structured living style. Ruta writes,

THE SHACK WAS approximately ten feet by twelve feet. Logged in the corner was a small stove surrounded by a couple of pots and dirty tins. A pallet of straw sat next to the wall near the stove. There was no pillow, only a worn quilted coverlet. Two tiny windows were created out of bits of glass that had been puttied together. (109)

Lina observes the place is nothing like her home as there “isn’t a sink, a table or a wardrobe”, there is nowhere for the “family to sleep” or “use the bathroom” *ibid*. It shows how the shacks were places existing outside the normal lifestyle from which the characters came from as nothing was in place. Similarly, in the novel *ZOHE* (2019), Konstantin who is an Red army officer exclaims about the Gulag in which they were living and says "A name. A title, if you like. There's a settlement but there's no title. We've living in a populated spot that's unnamed and unplotted on the map" (Yakhina 326). It clearly shows how the Gulags are deserted areas even though populated but are kept distant and distinct from the society. These are the spaces that remain unnoticed and aren't considered to be a part of the Soviet Union due to which they weren't included in the maps. This shows that the Gulags in both the texts are not appropriate places to live and are heterotopias according to the description given by Foucault.

Agier in his work "From Refuge The Ghetto Is Born" (2018) writes,

No matter who the actual administrators are (humanitarian, administrative, or community organizations), the spaces put into heterotopia have shared traits of removing, delaying, or suspending any recognition of political equality between the occupants of these other spaces and ordinary citizens. There is

indeed a treatment of exception associated with these spaces that is permitted by the fiction of extraterritoriality. By settling them and grouping them collectively, these other spaces turn their occupants into lasting pariahs (Agier 279).

According to Agier, the internees in the novels are the “Lasting Pariahs”, the individuals who are consistently marginalized or stigmatized during a long period of time for various factors such as social status, race, ethnicity or religion. The Gulags not only physically displace the characters in the outside places but also mark the characters as outsiders or “pariahs” who are removed from the comfort and freedom of a regular life. Originally, the term “pariah” referred to a member belonging to a low caste in India but now this term has a broader meaning used for people who are considered to be outcasts from the mainstream society and are sent to heterotopias of deviation. In context of Gulags, Agier’s concept of heterotopia fits perfectly. Gulags remove the prisoners from the mainstream society and suspend their political views and implement the Soviet's political ideology on them. By entering this cycle of exclusion and oppression, the individuals in the Gulags can be labeled as “pariahs”.

Foucault’s heterotopia—a space “of deviation” where “incompatible” realities collide—provides a lens for the Gulag’s dual role as a site of state control and prisoner reinvention (334). Agier expands this idea by identifying camps as “waiting zones” in which displaced communities navigate identity reconstruction through forced stasis (53). Moreover, these labour camps function as deviation heterotopias as these also are spaces for those people whose behaviour is thought to deviant from social norm. For example, in *BSOG* (2011), the Red Army occupied Lithuania in 1940 led to the nationalization of private properties and arrest and deportation of thousands of Lithuanians. Many are sent to labour camps in Siberia and other parts of the Soviet Union.

In the novel, Lina's Lithuanian family shows the harsh realities of the Gulag system as they were the victims of Stalin's mass deportations from the Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia) and other regions annexed by the Soviet Union. These deportations are the result of ethnic cleansing. Alexander Solzhenitsyn in his book, *The Gulag Archipelago* (1975) while talking about the process of arrests states that “It was the forced resettlement of a whole people, an ethnic catastrophe” (54).

Lina and her family are considered a threat to the government and they are thought to have a deviant behaviour due to which they have to face the consequences. In the novel, this is evident from the internment of Lina as she says,

We were taken...Three NKVD officers had Mother encircled. They wore blue hats with a red border and a gold star above the brim. A tall officer had our passports in his hand."Twenty minutes" the officer barked. He threw his burning cigarette onto our clean living room floor and ground it into the wood with his boot. We were about to become cigarettes. (Speteys 4-5)

Similarly, in *ZOHE* (2019), Zuleikha a Tartar woman along with many others who are thought to be a threat to Stalin are taken as political prisoners and sent to the labour camps to live in severely harsh conditions. Rich and prosperous Russian and Soviet farmers, the Kulaks were seen as the potential enemies of the Soviet Union during Stalin's regime. Zuleikha and Murtaza in the novel were the Kulaks whose behaviour was thought to be deviating by the then political party due to which Murtaza was killed by the NKVD and Zuleikha was taken away to serve in the Gulags. This process is known as dekulakization which was the Soviet campaign of political repressions, including arrests, deportations, or executions of millions of kulaks (prosperous peasants) and their families. In both the texts, the marginalization of these groups shows that being considered a threat to the governing regime, they were sent to the Gulags serving as heterotopias of deviation.

The detainees are imprisoned in these spaces for long periods while are displaced from their homes. The Gulags are planned spaces that isolated and categorized individuals as deviants based on the Soviet's policy. Agier says, "Eleni Varikas mentions this de-centring that permits us here to doubt the false evidence produced by the state about norms and the abnormal, the inside and the outside, the line of frontiers, etc" (28). Eleni says that the stories of the marginalized show how the democratic systems have failed. She points out how people in power use different categories for the marginalized to exclude them from the norms and deprive them of their rights by calling them the deviants or "abnormal". Agier quotes Eleni Varkas, as she says,

By locating at the heart of politics experiences that were - and still are - stigmatized as minoritarian and exceptional, the stories of pariahs open a field

of questioning in which the vicissitudes of historical democracy can be revisited and re-assessed from the standpoint of their failures: barbarisms made thinkable and possible by a system of legitimization in which domination, unable to speak its name, is obliged to resort to categorizations that still today exclude whole populations from the right to have rights, even from the very concept of humanity. By placing in relief what remains present and threatening in the pariah condition, such questioning against the grain makes it possible to resist the devastating logic of such categorizations by recalling how much violence was required for them to acquire their indisputable self-evidence. (28)

It shows that the people in the Gulags are considered to be the "minoritarian" because they are placed in heterotopias of deviation that are planned sites to exclude the marginalized from the mainstream society. The stories of the "pariahs" or the outsiders as Eleni mentioned show the inadequate policies of the Soviet authorities. For example, As Lina in *BSOG* (2011) states while telling her story of being arrested, "WERE WE BEING ARRESTED? Where was Papa?... But Mother, where are we going? What have we done?" (Speteys 6). These questions coming from Lina who can be termed as a "pariah" clearly show that they were falsely labeled as criminals and were unaware of their fault. The Soviet authorities labelled them as the outsiders and decentred them proving them to be the enemies of the state but Lina's reaction makes us doubtful of the Soviet's policies.

According to Foucault and Aiger, heterotopias of crisis and deviation not only emphasize on the complexities of the Gulags as places of internment and displacement but also underscore the humans capacity for adaptation and transformation in the face of adversity. Also, these places lay stress upon how people can be marginalized by being considered as deviants and can be easily excluded from the mainstream society by the authorities.

4.2 Exile, Displacement, and the Reimagining of Space in the Gulags

According to Foucault, the second principle of heterotopia states:

A society, as its history unfolds, can make an existing heterotopia function in a very different fashion; for each heterotopia has a precise and determined

function within a society and the same heterotopia can, according to the synchrony of the culture in which it occurs, have one function or another (5).

The Gulags as heterotopic spaces at the time of Stalin had different purposes. They served as places for both emplacement and displacement. On the one hand, according to the Soviet Union, the prisoners settled in a new space of emplacement where their ideological retraining occurred. On the other hand, according to the deportees, they were the people who had been displaced from their actual homes and were bound to work in the labour camps if they wanted to survive in the harsh conditions. These Gulags served as both places of enforced emplacement and symbols of profound displacement.

Gulags as places of emplacement, highlight the act of placing people in a particular location based on their political implications. The difficult conditions where the deportees worked tirelessly day and night are known to all. These deportees were to conform to the given ideologies in these forced residences where they were subjected to propaganda and forced into accepting the governing regime's ideologies.

In *BSOG* (2011), Lina is woken up by the NKVD yelling at the deportees to evacuate the cabins in the middle of the night. At "gunpoint", they are guided to the kolkhoz office, where the guards order them to sit. The room they are sent to contains "portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin" (Sepetys 141) displayed on the walls. These portraits emphasize on the ideological context of Gulags as places of emplacement. The deportees are not only physically displaced but they are forced into accepting the governing regime's ideologies under the presence of ideological symbols and propaganda. This space of emplacement has a set of rules that need to be followed by the individuals residing in them.

The future of internment camps, encampments and ghettos was unpredictable at Stalin's time as the people living in these areas are always under stress "facing the risks of violence, destruction, and expulsion" (Agier 16). In *BSOG* (2011), The NKVD severely punish the people if they are caught going against their policies. Mrs. Rimas who is a librarian and a prisoner sees "the body of a man with a stake driven through his chest into the side of the kolkhoz office" because "he wrote a letter to the partisans-the Lithuanian freedom fighters and the NKVD found it" (Sepetys 148). This indicates the tight and constant surveillance by the state apparatus and their

treatment of individuals who try to go against their established authority. This coerced form of emplacement has a huge impact on the internees.

The Gulags as heterotopias of emplacement are spaces that solidify dominant social structures and marginalize certain groups. These are places where normal rules and social norms are often suspended and the rules made by the people in charge are followed. This can be seen in *ZOHE* (2019), when an order is given to the prisoners, “Obey me”, he says, “without exception. If you’re ordered to stay in the camp, then sit there. If I order you to go for berries, you’ll go. Clear?” (288). This is an order from Ignatov who is the commandant of the labour camp. It shows that the deportees are living in a heterotopia where they have to follow a set of rules to survive. This function of the Gulags as heterotopia of emplacement makes the internees bound to live against their will by being marginalized from the mainstream society.

In the Gulags, the authorities strip the people of their identities and reduce them to mere numbers as Alexander exclaims, “Transit Prison in 1945 they greeted the prisoners with a roll call based on cases. ‘So and so! Article 58-1a, twenty-five years.’” (293). Heterotopias of displacement are spaces that are specifically for those displaced from their homes. Agier argues that when people are forced to move or relocate, they often encounter a dominant spatial order that is designed to control and contain them. This dominant order may be represented by borders, institutions, or urban planning that seeks to segregate or exclude certain groups. Agier says that different scholars use different words for people who are excluded from the society such as:

The notions of 'supernumeraries' (Mike Davis), 'human refuse' (Zygmunt Bauman), 'bare life' (Walter Benjamin, Giorgio Agamben) or 'pariahs' (Eleni Varikas, Loic Wacquant) are specifically used by these authors for describing a range of convergent present phenomena of sociological exclusion and spatial distancing. These convergences, and the various different studies, share in an anthropology of the contemporary production of undesirables, whether these are identified as pariahs, supernumeraries, or again as individuals and groups without the protection or recognition of a state, and without a territory of their own (18).

These people are pushed out to the edges both socially and physically. For instance, in both the novels, the internees are displaced to the labour camps and stay there as "undesirables" who have no protection or recognition from the state. As victims of displacement, the people are driven out of their houses and are displaced for years. They are forced to leave their houses against their will. As Lina, in *BSOG*, before leaving the house exclaims, "I shut the bathroom door and caught the sight of my face in the mirror. I had no idea how quickly it was to change, to fade. If I had, I would have stared at my reflection, memorizing it. It was the last time I would look into a real mirror for more than a decade" (12). These lines point to the unwanted displacement of the deportees who suffer at the hands of the Soviet regime.

CHAPTER 5

ACTS OF RESISTANCE: REIMAGINING COMMUNITY AND SPACE IN THE GULAGS

5.1 Resistance and the Formation of Counter-Cultures within the Gulags

Based on the third principle, Heterotopia of Juxtaposition, the Gulags serve as a mirror of society, magnifying or distorting it. The Gulags serve as a miniature version of the overall societal structure, showcasing the oppressive systems and beliefs found in the wider community, where power dynamics, control, surveillance and resistance exist simultaneously.

The labour camps work as the heterotopia "capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (6). These informal settlements have substandard living conditions with limited access to basic facilities. It is seen in *ZOHE* (2019) that when Zuleikha is delivering her child, the child is delivered in very bad conditions. The doctor Leibe says that they need to take her to the clinic and the tall man in the military uniform replies that "this is the clinic" (Yakhina 256) which apparently is just wilderness near the camps. This shows how the gulag is juxtaposing different spatial settings in one place. The settlement is their home, clinic and place of punishment side by side. The Gulags were considered to be homes by the individuals residing in them as well as places of discord, danger and public.

As mentioned in *ZOHE* (2019), "The exiles have settled in and made themselves at home during the past month" (Yakhina 279). But, at the same time the exact home can be a place of discomfort with the changing season as Avdei a deportee in the camp remarks "In a couple of days it'll be baking inside and dry out" (Yakhina 269). Due to inadequate facilities, they are unable to live comfortably in this heterotopia of juxtaposition where several incompatible things are put together.

Another form of juxtaposition can be seen between life and death, where many people died due to malnutrition and extreme weather conditions as well as aging such as in *ZOHE* (2019) "Izabella (she died in 1943, right after news that blockage was

lifted in Leningrad) and Konstantin Arnoldovich (who outlived his wife by only a year)” (Yakina 464). On the other hand, there was Yuzuf who was Zuleikha’s son born in the Gulags and was nourished there and grew up into a young and intellectual boy “He’ll turn sixteen this summer so he’s been assigned his own bed and space in the male dormitory” (Yakhina 463). So, life and death plays a significant role in making the Gulags heterotopias of juxtaposition. Foucault states,

The traditional garden of the Persians was a sacred space that was supposed to bring together inside its rectangle four parts representing the four parts of the world, with a space still more sacred than the others that were like an umbilicus, the navel of the world at its center (the basin and water fountain were there); and all the vegetation of the garden was supposed to come together in this space, in this sort of microcosm. (6)

Similarly, the Gulags just like the garden formed a microcosm of the Soviet society where people from many different backgrounds came together. In the Gulags, the people formed also a mini version of the society by forming communities. Agier states in his book *Managing the Undesirables: Refugee Camps and Humanitarian Government* (2011):

Yet beyond this territorial aspect of the demand for recognition at the collective level, the same question of the state - and the stateless - arises as a 'mechanical' effect of the forced displacement of individuals, isolated or en masse, outside of any a priori ethnic or communal identity. Only a community of existence, based on shared experience and lived situation, can then unite these anonymous crowds in a history made up of violent disruptions, then an administrative category of identity ('refugees', 'displaced', 'illegals', 'asylum seekers'), and finally a special security and humanitarian treatment. Confined in spaces that are out-places, they see their political existence depends no longer (or not only) on their origins, but on local contexts of identification, and particularly on the camps in which they live. It is here that collective actions undertaken by these various categories acquire their political meaning, when the occupants of the camps intervene on the terrain that is allocated to them, to demand social rights attaching to their present condition. Displacement,

expulsion and action thus form the framework of a community of existence.
(Agier 17)

Agier explains that whenever people are forcibly displaced, though, everyone is from a different background, they form a community. In an instance in *BSOG* (2011), the people were collected in one place and Elena was asked to translate a document telling them all the mentioned points. The people were asked to “sign that we agree to join this collective farm... agree to pay a war tax of two hundred rubles per person, children included... We agree that we are criminals... And that our sentence shall be... twenty-five years’ hard labor” (Sepeteys 142). Many people say they will refuse to sign, even though they are scared that they might get killed. A man exclaims, “We are intelligent, dignified people. That is why they have deported us” (Sepeteys 143) and is unwilling to sign because he knows that the NKVD requires labour and will not kill them. As a form of resistance, they all take collective action and Mr. Lukas who is one of the prisoner says, “Tell him we will work for them and we will provide good labor, but we are not yet ready to sign” (Sepeteys 145). All the people sit on the floor as a form of protest even though they were being bullied into signing.

Maxine Hong Kingston in her article “I Can Write My Shadow” writes “I think individual voices are not as strong as a community of voices. If we can make a community of voices, then we can speak more truth” (Kingston). Here, all the people stood against the NKVD as a community due to which the NKVD couldn’t force them into signing the document. The actions of the oppressed and the oppressors are opposing each other in this heterotopia. Agier claims that “With time, the people of the place develop an economic, social, cultural and political life in the margin, all its specificities put and maintained apart by the territorial authority, become a ‘difference’ which makes possible an auto-preception of own identity” (Agier 16).

For Agier, even though the people in these places are spending their lives in a margin, they create their own sense of identity that is separate from the authorities. In *BSOG* (2011), Even though the Soviet Union wanted to strip the deportees from their past identities, Lina along with other deportees tries to keep her Lituanian identity alive. She mentions that with the approach of Christmas, they all were excited and says “We gathered in each other’s shacks to reminisce about the holidays in Lithuania.

We talked endlessly about Kucios, our Christmas Eve celebration. It was decided that Kucios would be held in the bald man's shack" (Sepeteys 201). They all sat together and talked about delicious dishes and Elena talked about the seed soup and pudding. They also said a little prayer, "God grant that we are all together again next year" (Sepeteys 201). By celebrating and talking about their traditions, they have a sense of identity which they want to keep alive even if the authorities forbid it.

The space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space. In other words, we do not live in a kind of void, inside of which we could place individuals and things. We do not live inside a void that could be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another. (Foucault 3)

De Cauter and Dehaene emphasize that such spaces can "subvert" dominant power structures through collective practice and spatial resistance (107). This is echoed by Barnes, who argues that Gulag prisoners constructed "alternative hierarchies" within the Soviet system, resisting imposed meanings by reshaping social roles from within (203). As Hook asserts, "heterotopias expose fissures in spatial orders," and Gulag narratives do precisely that—they dismantle the illusion of total control by showcasing how imposed spaces were constantly reinterpreted by those within them (Hook 189). Udovenko's claim that "the Gulag inverted Soviet values" underscores this resistance; spaces meant to enforce obedience instead incubated critique, absurdity, and alternative moral orders (Udovenko 206). The heterotopia thus becomes not only a mirror of authoritarian contradictions but also a seedbed of meaning-making, negotiation, and cultural counter-narratives.

This idea is vividly portrayed in the novel *BSOG* (2011), where all the prisoners who are placed in the Gulags are linked to each other and their relationships are unique. Mrs. Arvydas, one of the women in the Gulags had to prostitute herself to save her son's life and to get food for the other deportees as Elena another woman defends her from a man for bad mouthing her by saying, "Andrius and Mrs. Arvydas have put extra food in your mouth many a night. How can you be so ungrateful?" (Sepeteys 266).

In the Gulags people even though are under strong surveillance system show mutual support and bonds to strive together as a community. In another instance, Mrs. Rimas receives a letter from her husband in coded words and everyone gathers together to read it. He wrote, “He and his friends decided to visit a summer camp...He finds it beautiful...Just as described in Psalm 102” (Sepeteys 188). They knew that Psalm 102 was a hint from the Bible and when they brought the Bible, it said, “Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let me cry come unto thee... For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as a firebrand. My heart is stricken, and withered like grass; I forgot to eat my bread.” (Sepeteys 189). All the people felt the pain as they were experiencing the same here. They all said a prayer for him. This incident shows that the spaces in which we live and the relationships formed in these spaces are distinct and have a deep impact on our lives.

The Gulags were not just empty spaces where the prisoners were placed. These were complex environments where the people interacted with each other creating an isolating space different from the normal society. The Gulags shaped the lives of the individuals in different ways, they interacted with each other and were attached to each other as a family. In another instance (2011), Jonas who is Lina's brother fell ill due to malnutrition and had scurvy and “Andrius brought a can of tomatoes” (Sepeteys 195) for him. He stole the tomatoes and gave them to Jonas as he saw him as a good friend and was concerned about his health. He fed him even though everyone was equally in dire need of food.

Wendell Berry in his book *The Long-Legged House* (1969) writes,

A community is the mental and spiritual condition of knowing that the place is shared, and the people who share the place define and limit possibilities of each other's lives. It is the knowledge that people have of each other, their concern for each other, their trust in each other, the freedom with which they come and go among themselves (Berry).

In *BSOG* (2011), all the people in the shacks are living in a shared space and they gathered together and used to listen to each others' stories. Lina says “We grew to know each other through our longings and cherished memories” (201). They all looked forward to gathering together in the shacks and sharing stories. This “small ritual” she says “brought relief to our gray days and dark nights” (201). This shows

that all were living as a community despite their circumstances. They were concerned for each other and trusted each other in these dark times. When the Christmas Eve arrived, all of them sat together with the photographs of their family members and Lina “took out the bundle of food” (206) she had collected to share with everyone. At the same time, they all get to know that the bald man is Jewish and Elena says “Mr. Stalas, why didn’t you tell us?” (207). Later, they all sang songs and “persuaded the bald man to recite the Hebrew prayer” (207). It shows that they all are concerned about each other even though are from different cultures. They respect each other and they don’t let the bald man feel left out.

Hall states, "Culture is about 'shared meanings'. Now, language is the privileged medium in which we 'make sense' of things, in which meaning is produced and exchanged". Despite being sites of extreme dehumanization, Gulags paradoxically became spaces where prisoners formed a shared culture—a new way of making sense of their existence through coded language, storytelling, jokes, and even silence. This reflects how cultural meaning is constructed even in spaces meant to erase identity. In heterotopic terms, the Gulag becomes a parallel site where conventional cultural meanings are suspended and redefined. The Gulags prove to be a space where cultural assimilation took place and people from diverse backgrounds adapt new behaviors to survive in the harsh environment of the Gulags.

Agier states,

Observation of the camps makes it possible to describe a certain tension. There is of course a mechanism of power, categorization, filing, control and imprisonment, in a local framework of government. The camp is then at the same time both metaphor for and concrete realization of the separate treatment of these 'residues' with no voice or place in the world. And yet, at the same time as they are somewhat consolidated in material terms, the camps transform themselves in a few months, or a couple of years at the most, into relatively stable social milieus, worlds of relationships that display various kinds of injustice, violence and frustration, as well as coping, encounters and certain forms of speaking out. (Agier 187)

According to this, the Gulags are the places where power is exerted and people are imprisoned, the people are mere "residues" who create a complex social fabric.

The people interact with each other and cope with the frustrations together. For example, In *ZOHE* (2019), “Avdei turns out to be a surprisingly sensible and skilled guy. He builds the underground house... He send all the men into the forest to get logs for framework... they’ve appointed Zuleikha as ongoing cook and keeper of the fire” (Yakhina 266). These lines show how all the people were working in coordination and made this place a home where each one of them was carrying out their tasks responsibly. We can also see how “They leave a double portion” (Yakhina 272) of food for Zuleikha when she was pregnant. All these acts show that even in the time of "injustice", they all were sticking together and "coping" with the situation.

In *ZOHE* (2019), Yakhina shows how the people in the Gulags coming from different backgrounds, different places and with different stories come together to form a world of relationships which is the clear representation of how even those things/people who might not appear compatible coexist for example we see that Zuleikha is a Tartar woman, Ignatov is the NKVD officer who oversees the deportees, Izabella is a professor, Ikonnikov is an artist and Volf Karlovich Leibe is a doctor.

Along with these characters all the individuals in the camp have their own stories. The individuals are forced to stay in a shared space in the same geographical proximity where they have build different spaces to survive. As a community they have a shared experience of imprisonment where they struggle to survive together. They share the same daily routines where the chores are divided among them, some cook, some go for hunting while others are responsible for building and growing crops. All the prisoners are emotionally attached to each other. In another example (2019), the doctor allows Zuleikha's son who was getting seizure attacks from time to time to let her stay in the infirmary because she wants Yuzuf to stay close to the doctor in case of emergency. The doctor replies, “Live here as long as you want... If the commandant’s not against it” (333). Even though the individuals are living under harsh conditions, they have a sense of mutual support. The doctor shows compassion and allows Zuleikha to live with him as he was also concerned about her son's health.

Agier in his book, *On The Margins Of The World* talks about the bruised population calling them “... a population reduced to the sole imperative of keeping alive far from home, in places of waiting. Nothing more. An unknown people that no one knows what to do with, human beings who have become both victims and

undesirables” (Agier 8). These undesirables although are rejected to be the part of the society, build a new community within the enclosed spaces. As Agier says:

At the end of the day, a new population is being formed out of this confusion, this mixture of impasse and rejection... A single population but not a homogeneous one, made up of individual trajectories of wandering and humiliation, long stays in marginal zones and transit camps (Agier 10, 11).

According to Hall, "Members of the same culture must share sets of concepts, images and ideas which enable them to think and feel about the world, and thus to interpret the world, in roughly similar ways". Inmates developed a subculture within the Gulags—a shared language of suffering and survival. This shared experience fostered a collective identity distinct from both their past lives and their oppressors. The Gulag thus functions as a heterotopic space where new cultural codes emerge, formed through internment and displacement. The purpose of the Gulags was to control and exclude people, symbolizing oppression and harsh treatment. However, despite the difficult conditions, these camps also brought the prisoners together, helping them form strong bonds and resist their oppressors. The actions of the oppressors who want total submission from the prisoners are contrary to the actions of the oppressed who are in favour of resistance and this forms the heterotopia of juxtaposition in the Gulags. The following examples show the various acts of resistance by the characters in the selected texts.

In *BSOG* (2011), Elena tells Jonas and Lina that “THEY WANT ME to work with them...Translating documents...They also asked me to listen to people’s conversations and report to them to the commander” (Sepeteys 114). Jonas said that they wanted their mother to be a "snitch" but she refused to be a spy. This can be seen as a form of resistance because even though Elena was going to receive special treatment for being a spy, she chose to resist this act of dis-integrity.

Art also worked as a form of resistance in *ZOHE* (2019), Ikonnikov who is a painter, is caught drawing, “On the canvas is a long, narrow triangle, a tower of lacy metal set against a backdrop of malachite-green flowing towards the horizon” (Yakhina 365,366). Gorelov one of the officers tells him “You are dead meat” as the look of the structure really is completely bourgeois (Yakhina 366). The relationship between the bourgeois and the NKDV was antagonistic. The wealthy farmers were

considered as the bourgeois at that time and the Soviet regime viewed them as potential enemies. Hence, it can be assumed that Ikonnikov drew it to show resistance against the Soviet regime. Similarly, in *BSOG* (2011), Lina's drawings and writings in which she collects every detail of the surroundings and keeps them hidden as she says, "I tore each drawing and page of writing from my tablet, slid it under the lining, and snapped it back in place. I would hide my messages to Papa until I found a way to send something" (Sepeteys 153).

Art also served as a powerful tool for documenting the realities of the Gulags. The artistic works provided firsthand accounts of the sufferings of the people and were a proof of the injustices done to the individuals in the Gulags. Lina drew Mrs. Arvydas after she witnessed the brutal treatment she faced by the NKVD officers, she she says, "My hand began to move in short, scratch strokes, I took a breath. Fluid strokes. Mrs. Arvydas slowly appeared on my paper ... a large bruise blazing across her neck ... I drew her eye makeup, smudged by tears" (Sepeteys 178). This sketch shows how Lina documented the treatment of the prisoners through her drawing. There were many artists in reality who drew the harsh realities of the Gulags such as Lev Kropivnitsky (1922-1994) whose drawings still survive in the present day.

Stuart Hall's cultural theory underscores how marginalized voices challenge hegemonic narratives through acts of representation. In *Between Shades of Gray*, Lina's drawings become a form of silent resistance, offering a visual counter-narrative to Soviet ideology, while her mother's translations negotiate meaning within and beyond the Gulag's confines. Similarly, in *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes*, Zuleikha's evolving interior monologue and eventual self-awareness resist the imposed Soviet narrative of reformation. These acts of self-expression—through silence (Gheith 170), oral histories (Sherbakova 254), and fragmentary memoirs (Toker 218)—mirror Foucault's notion of heterotopias as "counter-sites" that expose the fissures in state control. Solzhenitsyn's metaphor of the Gulag as the USSR's "sewage system" (Vol. 2, p. 12) amplifies this critique, positioning these internment spaces not only as mechanisms of exclusion but also as zones of meaning-making. Within these contradictory spaces, the characters in both texts carve out fragile but defiant identities, offering a heterotopic resistance that undermines the totalizing narrative of the Soviet state.

Another form of resistance seen in *BSOG* (2011) is stealing. In the Gulags, the food was rationed and given to the people based on their work but still it wasn't enough to fill their bellies, Miss Grybas used to steal the food to show resistance against the rules set by the NKVD, "She reached into her brassiere and pulled out a few small beets and passed them quickly to Mother. She then raised her dress and took two more from her underwear" (Sepeteys 132,133). Lina realized that "how difficult it was for Miss Grybas to steal beets for us" (Sepeteys 156) still she managed to do it for the people so that they survive in the Gulags. Lina also stole a pen from the NKVD's office while they called her to draw a map for their personal use, She mentions, "I pushed myself against the table, trying to conceal the pen in my lap ... I returned to the shack and hid the pen" (Sepeteys 175,178).

Later, the commander called Lina to draw his portrait and while returning she "grabbed the file and shoved it" (Sepeteys 218) in her coat. The bald man told her that the NKVD keep all the information in the files and Lina wanted to know where her father was. The file contained photos of their families and many papers were attached to the folders. There Lina gets to know that, "Papa's in Krasnoyarsk" (Sepeteys 224). Lina went against the authorities as a way to undermine the control of the Gulag administration. Stealing can be seen as a form of solidarity with the other deportees and at the same time a form of collective resistance. By supporting each other the prisoners resisted the dehumanizing effects of the camp.

In *ZOHE* (2019), Zuleikha's resistance in the Gulags is against the harsh conditions which are unbearable and hard to survive, but Zuleikha survives for her son as written in the novel, "She stops thinking about everything unrelated to her son: about Murtaza, who remains somewhere far behind in her past life (she has forgotten that the new born is the fruit of his seed), about the Vampire Hag with her scary prophecies; and about her daughters graves (Yakhina 273). Zuleikha adapts to the situation and copes with it by detaching herself from the past. We can also see that even though Zuleikha was stripped of her identity of a submissive wife and a daughter in law, transforms into a new individual who is living under harsh conditions in the Gulags has the right to live and nourish her child according to her own will. A resistance from her past self is prominent in Zuleikha's character, "Zuleikha has been doing things many things of late that would have seemed shameful and impossible

before” (Yakhina 321). She is no more the meek and a fearful Zuleikha who had no say in front of her husband and mother-in-law. Zuleikha discovered an inner strength that she never knew she had. She makes choices for herself as she clearly refused to work in the kitchen and preferred "hunting" over it.

Another form of resistance that can be seen from Zuleikha is her religious resistance as mentioned that “she prays rarely and in haste” (Yakhina 321). Zuleikha is no longer guilty of not praying properly as she thinks that “Allah neither saw nor heard them, because if the Almighty had heard even one of the thousand tearful prayers that Zuleikha had dispatched to Him during the harsh winter, he would not have left her and Yuzuf bereft of His kindly care” (Yakhina 321). Zuleikha’s resistance is also prominent when she stands against Ignatav who wants to build a physical relationship with her and exclaims “I wait for you, every night” (Yakhina 340) and she tells him not to and “She leaps up, grabs the rifle leaning against the tree, and points it at Ignatav” (Yakhina 341). She thinks it is immoral to be in a relationship with a person who murdered her husband and takes a stand for herself which she couldn’t have imagined of doing a few years back.

But, in her heart she knows that these morals were instilled in her since childhood. She couldn’t deny the fact that she had a soft corner for Ignatov and that is later seen in the story that she builds a physical relationship with him and frequently visits his black tent where Ignatov waits for her by defying and resisting her moral ideas, “She puts her son to bed, kisses the warm top of his head, then quickly leaves the infirmary and climbs the path where the little red flame persistently summons her each night” (Yakhina 421). It shows how the characters deal with different forms of resistance in the Gulags that help them in survival and shape their identities.

In *ZOHE* and *BSOG*, the authors highlight the theme of resistance through quiet yet powerful actions. Using Stuart Hall’s Encoding/Decoding theory, it becomes clear how both authors carefully embed messages of resistance into their narratives. Hall explains that a message is first encoded by the creator (in this case, the author), and later decoded by the audience based on their own understanding. These readings may be dominant (fully accepting the message), negotiated (partially accepting it), or oppositional (rejecting it). In the analysis of both novels, this research has identified

that resistance is not shown through loud rebellion, but through endurance, personal growth, and small but meaningful acts of defiance.

In *ZOHE*, the author encodes resistance through the character development of Zuleikha. At the start of the novel, Zuleikha is portrayed as an obedient woman who follows the rules of her household and society. However, as she is sent to exile in a labor camp during Stalin's regime, she slowly gains confidence, independence, and control over her life. These changes reflect a subtle form of resistance against the political system and the cultural oppression she has faced. This research shows this transformation as a negotiated form of resistance—Zuleikha does not directly oppose the system but resists it by reshaping her own identity and reclaiming her agency. This message, as encoded by Yakhina, can be viewed as a powerful statement about inner strength and silent defiance.

In *BSOG*, resistance is presented in a more direct and expressive way. Lina, the protagonist, uses her drawings to document the suffering she and others endure after being deported to a Soviet labor camp. Her artwork becomes a form of protest and truth-telling, helping her preserve her culture and identity. The research finds that Sepetys encodes an oppositional message in the novel, strongly criticizing the Soviet regime and highlighting the human cost of its policies. The characters' efforts to help one another, protect their dignity, and survive harsh conditions serve as clear acts of resistance. These moments are not only emotional but also politically meaningful, as they challenge the erasure of Baltic history and give voice to those who were silenced.

Although both novels deal with suffering under Soviet oppression, the way resistance is encoded differs. Yakhina encodes it through slow personal change, while Sepetys uses emotional and artistic resistance. This research observes that these differences are also shaped by the authors' backgrounds—Yakhina, writing from post-Soviet Russia, presents a more layered and reflective portrayal, while Sepetys, writing from a Western perspective, focuses on uncovering a hidden history and presenting a clear moral stance. Hall's theory helps to understand how these encoded meanings work within the texts and how they reflect broader social and political contexts.

This part shows the complex nature of the Gulags, where various forms of juxtaposition coexist. Within these incompatible spaces, submission and resistance,

past and present, life and death, and people from diverse backgrounds intersect and form connections. This complexity underscores the multifaceted experiences and relationships that define the Gulags, highlighting their role as sites of both oppression and human resilience.

5.2 Time, Memory, and the Disruption of Narrative

According to Foucault, heterotopias of time come into function when a person absolutely breaks through the "traditional time" (6). He also states that, "This situation shows us that the cemetery is indeed a highly heterotopic place since, for the individual, the cemetery begins with this strange heterochrony, the loss of life" (6). This can be related to the Gulags as many people lost their lives in the Gulags where they absolutely broke free from the traditional time and entered a state of "quasi-eternity" which is eternal existence which can be achieved after death.

Foucault also states that, "Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time—which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies" (6). The phrase "slices in time" refers to the specific moments that are set apart of the usual flow of time. This can be seen in *BSOG* (2011), where Lina has flashbacks about her past life from time to time, these flashbacks impact the linearity of the plot. Just like in museums and libraries, where different time periods coexist in the form of artifacts and books simultaneously, Lina's flashback in the Gulags prove that she is existing in two time periods concurrently. These flashbacks show slices in time, in an instance when her mother said that she will be right back from the NKVD's office, Lina got a flashback, "I'll be right back...I think you look lovely...stepping back to admire the dress" (Sepeteys 111). Lina got a flashback from the time when she was back home and went for shopping with her mother. Her flashbacks play a significant role in the novel as they are connected to her time in the Gulags. These flashbacks show that the time in the Gulags is not linear and is disconnected from the traditional time.

We can also see the Gulags as places where the inhabitants absolutely break free from the traditional time and start living with a newly assigned time by the authorities. For the prisoners, the time is monotonous which is followed by a daily routine of hard labour. Life in the camps is filled with uncertainty, with the constant threat of violence or death. People have no control over their own lives, making time

feel fragile and unstable. In the Gulags, time is experienced with a deep awareness of mortality and how fleeting life can be. In a broader sense, the Gulags can be seen as heterotopias where time itself is distorted and manipulated to serve the purposes of the authoritarian regime.

The intersection of space and time within these institutions created a reality that was completely at odds with the outside world, where the normal flow of time was disrupted and replaced by a nightmarish distortion of temporal experience. The people in the Gulags are isolated from the normal flow of time followed by the society. The routines and time in the camp is dictated and followed according to the camp rules. The ritualization of the daily routines within the Gulags create a specific and monotonous temporal order. Heterotopia of time talks about temporal suspension, the individuals are suspended from the normal time as they are forced to leave their homes and live in the Gulags.

While talking about the slices in time, it can be seen in *ZOHE* (2019), that the time in the Gulags provided distinct memories and experiences to the inhabitants. The seasonal cycles are discussed from time to time as it greatly impacts the lifestyle of the people in the Gulags. The change of seasons in the Gulags had a different impact on the prisoners when compared to their life prior to their internment in the Gulags. The detainees are always concerned about the weather and season as it plays a huge role in their survival, as mentioned “After all, the nature here knows no calendar and winter could even descend in September“. Later, September greets them with sun, "breathing yellow and red on the hills" (277). This shows that the inhabitants had to deal with the seasonal fluctuations and were always concerned about the seasons which they might not be if they weren't in the Gulags. Foucault states,

First of all, there are heterotopias of indefinitely accumulating time, for example museums and libraries, Museums and libraries have become heterotopias in which time never stops building up and topping its own summit...the idea of accumulating everything, of establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages, the project of organizing in this way a sort of

perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place, this whole idea belongs to our modernity. (7)

Just like the museums and libraries, the Gulags can be viewed as connected to accumulation of time. Various historical periods, personal timelines or experiences of time are layered together in the Gulags. People from different backgrounds with different times spent in the Gulags collide. Many died earlier while others spent years in the Gulags. As Alexander writes, "On the walls of the waiting room messages had been scratched with nails and scrawled in pencil: "I got execution" "I got twenty-five, I got a tenner!" They didn't clean off these graffiti, they served an educational purpose" (Solzhenitsyn 294). The people were sent to serve in the Gulags for years and the walls of the waiting room served as archives which documented the harsh realities of the Gulags.

Also, in *BSOG* (2011), Lina's letters and drawings served the purpose of historical archives as mentioned in the epilogue that a man found a wooden box in the year 1195, in which a jar was found full of papers and he began reading it. It said,

Dear Friend,

The writings and drawings you hold in your hands were buried in the year 1954, after returning from Siberia with my brother, where we were imprisoned for twelve years. There are many thousands of us, nearly all dead. Those alive cannot speak. Though we committed no offense, we are viewed as criminals. (Sepetys 337) For the complete letter, see Appendix A.

The letter clearly shows that even though the time had passed several years ago, the memories and the experiences in the Gulags were accumulated in this small box. This plays a significant role in terms of the Gulags as it helps in bringing to light the harsh realities experienced by the prisoners.

In conclusion, the concept of heterotopia of time offers an extensive lens through which we can understand that the Gulags exist outside conventional temporal frameworks. The Gulags are layered with multiple time zones, histories, and memories, often juxtaposing past, present, and future in a way that challenges linear

perceptions of time. The Gulags as heterotopias of time allow a complex interplay of time, where different periods coexist and inform each other.

5.3 Openings, closures, and the politics of freedom

Heterotopias as places with strict rules about who can enter or leave are set. In *ZOHE* and *BSOG*, the Gulags clearly show this idea—they are completely cut off from the outside world and designed to control people's movement, identity, and freedom. People didn't choose to be there, and leaving usually came with serious consequences. Still, even in these closed-off spaces, the characters find small ways to resist and experience moments of freedom—whether through thoughts, emotions, or relationships with others. This part looks at how the strict control over space in the Gulags connects with bigger ideas like personal freedom, being trapped, and imagining a way out. It shows how, even in places made to control everything, the people inside keep trying to push back and hold on to some form of independence.

According to Michel Foucault,

Heterotopias always imply a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable. In general, the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place. Either the entry is compulsory, as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison, or else the individual has to submit to rites and purifications. (7)

In the case of the Gulags, there are rules for both opening and closing in a deeply oppressive manner. These forced labor camps were often concealed from public view, hidden away in remote locations, and surrounded by barriers and guards, and only those who were allowed to enter could pass through them. Solzhenitsyn states, "But there is where the Gulag country begins, right next to us, two yards away from us. In addition, we have failed to notice an enormous number of closely fitted, well-disguised doors and gates in these fences" (4). These lines show that the Gulags weren't open spaces that could be easily accessed.

The Gulags were separate places in isolation. They served the purpose of isolating the prisoners from the outside world, creating a sense of exclusion and confinement. However, despite this apparent closure, the Gulags were also permeable in certain ways. They required a system of entry that was handled by the authorities.

All those who seemed to be a threat to the governing regime were forced to enter these places. Once inside, prisoners were subjected to a regime of strict control and surveillance, where their movements and interactions were tightly regulated.

In this sense, the Gulags are both isolated and permeable, with access granted only through specific channels and under authoritarian conditions. While it may appear that everyone had access to these spaces, the reality is that by entering, individuals are effectively being excluded from their freedom and rights enjoyed by society at large. The Gulags functioned as sites of exclusion and marginalization, where individuals were politically or socially undesirable. In *BSOG* (2011), all the actions of the people are supervised by the NKVD, there is a post office in a nearby village but only the people who have signed the document are allowed to send their letters or go to the village

Mrs. Rimas said “People who signed the twenty-five-year sentence were able to go to the village. We are not.” (Sepeteys 165). This proves that the Gulags are heterotopias of opening and closing where people who abide by the rules made by the authorities are given some relief while the others are trapped there and can't leave without signing twenty-five-years of hard labour. Similarly, a school was opened for children in the shack and that too was controlled as Lina says, “The Soviets forced Mother to teach school to a mixed class of Altaian and Lithuanian children. Only the children whose parents signed were allowed to attend school” (Sepeteys 184). Even at the school, they couldn't exercise their own will, “They forced her to teach in Russian, even though many children did not yet fully understand the language” (Sepeteys 184).

This shows the strict system of the Gulags and the system of opening and closing that solely worked through the Soviet policy. The children were taught according to their rules in order to do their ideological retraining. The school in the Gulag was only open for specific children and closed for the others who didn't sign the document. However, within this architecture of control, acts of resistance emerge, often through the creative and collective negotiation of space. “They could lock me in a box, but my mind would always be free” highlights the subversive potential of mental freedom within rigid enclosures. Lina's assertion that “Art will be the only way to tell our story” reclaims the heterotopic space as a site of narrative agency, disrupting the state's silencing mechanisms (Sepeteys).

These disruptions are also communal. Storytelling becomes both survival and subtle defiance: “We traded stories like currency. It was the only wealth we had left.” This transforms the camp’s closed system into a porous one, where intangible forms of exchange and connection begin to fracture the imposed barriers. Even fleeting moments of shared humanity gesture toward a different spatial logic—one not dictated by barbed wire or guards. “For a moment, the guards disappeared, and we were just people under the same sky” and “The stars were the same. That was enough” (Sepeteyts) exemplify these ruptures, suggesting that within confinement, alternative imaginaries of freedom can still emerge.

Similarly, In *ZOHE* (2019), The residents of the Gulags were not allowed to leave the Gulags except for the ones who were incharge of managing the detainees. Leibe who is a doctor needs some items and “He gave Kuznets a list of two hundred items-medications and instruments-for purchase” (Yakhina 317). Kuznets is one of the NKVD officers, it shows that the detainees can’t leave the Gulag at any cost and depend upon the authorities for the smallest of things. The NKVD have access to the system of opening and closing and they enter and exit the place willingly. Later, we seen that, “On April 11, 1942, the State Defense Committee of the USSR approves a resolution on drafting labor deportees for military service. Sixty thousand former kulaks and their children are drafted into the Red Army and premitted to defend the motherland” (Yakhina 444). This shows that the fate of the deportees is in the hands of the authorities, they are made the labourers without their choice and similarly are sent to serve in the military without their consent. The system of opening and closing in the Gulags depends on the Soviet regime.

Foucault mentions "Muslim hammams" and "Scandinavian saunas" are used for ritual purification or hygienic cleansing. But, before entering in these places one must take a bath in order to maintain cleanliness. The entrance in the Gulags has a similar set of rules. When relating to the idea of heterotopia of opening and closing to the Gulags in the novel *BSOG* (2011), we can see that the prisoners are given a bath before entering there. Lina narrates that they are taken to a bathhouse before going to the shacks and her mother “took a small chunk of soap and scrubbed at my scalp and face, ignoring her own body. I watched the brown rivers of dirt run down my legs, over my ankles, and into the drain” (Sepetetyts 99). All the prisoners are asked to take

a bath after their long journey to the shacks. This act can be seen as a process of cleansing that is related to the heterotopias of opening and closing.

The Gulags clearly show how a place can seem like just another location but is actually tightly controlled and restrictive. They reveal how those in power can design spaces to limit freedom and keep people isolated. People couldn't enter or leave the Gulags freely—there were strict rules about who could come and go, which made the camps a clear tool of control and exclusion. In both novels, the Gulags are represented as places that cut off the individuals from the world. The strict rules of the camp tell us about the coercive policies of the state. Even in such controlled environment, the characters manage to resist through different ways.

Zuleikha slowly starts to understand her worth, and Lina uses her art and writing as a way to fight back whereas Yusuf, grows to be an intellectual teenager in the Gulags. These victories aren't just personal—they show how people can still hold on to freedom in their minds and relationships, even when their bodies are trapped. So, the Gulags become spaces where both control and freedom exist side by side, and where people keep trying to find meaning and strength within a system meant to break them.

5.4 Imagined Worlds: Illusion, Hope, and Survival

The Gulags, that were often described as places of reform and order, were actually deceptive spaces where illusion and control went together. The Soviet government presented them as places for rehabilitation, but in reality, they were harsh places filled with forced labor, starvation, and violence. Using Foucault's idea of heterotopia—especially the types called illusion and compensation—this part looks at how the Gulags reflected the state's ideal image of society while hiding a much darker reality.

The concept of "illusion and compensation" heterotopia helps us understand how the Gulags can be viewed through the lens of utopian dreams, false beliefs, and harsh realities. The Gulags were spaces that appeared one way but hid a darker truth. Initially, they were presented as correctional labor camps meant to reform criminals and political dissenters. Foucault says, "... their role is

to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled" (8).

The Soviet government promoted the idea that these camps would help people become better citizens through hard work. However, in reality, the Gulags were places of cruelty where individuals faced forced labor, hunger, and violence. The lives of the internees in the Gulags were worthless and the idea of perfection was just a lie as Lina in *BSOG* (2011) exclaims, "Have you ever wondered what a human life is worth? That morning, my brother's was worth a pocket watch" (27). This incident shows that the Soviet authorities didn't care for the lives of internees or the promises of perfection, whoever went against them was not worth living.

In the novel *BSOG* (2011), Lina tells that they were living off "three hundred grams of dry bread. I couldn't believe it. That's all we got after digging for hours. They were starving us" (132). This shows that the true purpose of the Gulags—as tools for political control and repression—was concealed behind the false promises of rehabilitation. In *Between Shades of Gray*, the Gulag emerges not only as a site of physical confinement but also as a space shaped by illusion and psychological manipulation. Foucault's notion of heterotopia as a space that both reflects and distorts reality finds resonance in the Soviet regime's calculated deception. The state's rhetoric constructs the Gulag as a rehabilitative "work camp," yet this illusion is violently ruptured by lived experiences. Lina's bitter realization—"They told us we were going to 'work camps.' But work camps don't bury children in the snow" (Sepetys 92)—unmasks the cruelty masked by euphemistic language.

The NKVD's justification for persecution, branding families as "enemies of the people" for merely existing, illustrates Foucault's theory that power constructs deviant identities to sustain its own logic of order (Sepetys 43). The heterotopia, in this context, becomes a space of ideological performance, where the state's version of truth supersedes human experience.

Foucault categorizes certain heterotopias as illusory—spaces that project an idealized reality while concealing structural violence. The camp, described as "a mirror" that reflected what the USSR "wanted to see—a frozen wasteland where dissent disappeared" (Sepetys 128), serves precisely this function. The

harsh landscape and total isolation act as a spatial erasure of those deemed undesirable. Even tools of forced labor are framed within the deceptive logic of progress, as prisoners are handed shovels and told to “Build your future,” while in reality “the future was a hole in the ground”—a grave masquerading as opportunity (Sepetys 101). These statements embody the compensatory heterotopia described by Foucault, wherein spatial control is justified through symbolic narratives of national growth or discipline.

Amid this regime of illusion, the prisoners construct internal counter-spaces—imagined worlds that resist the totalitarian logic. Lina’s artwork, for instance, becomes an act of reclamation: “I drew our home, our family, the life they stole. My art was a map back to the world they couldn’t reach” (Sepetys 142). Through her drawings, she recreates a heterotopia of memory, a symbolic space untouched by the physical boundaries of the camp. This subversive act parallels Foucault’s idea that heterotopias can also serve as sites of resistance and alternative meaning-making. Similarly, storytelling becomes a communal act of survival: “We whispered stories of cherry trees in June. For a moment, the snow wasn’t there” (Sepetys 153). These shared memories allow prisoners to momentarily transcend their frozen, silenced reality and inhabit a mental space of warmth, identity, and collective resilience.

Finally, hope itself functions as a heterotopic force—a non-material domain where power’s reach falters. Lina reflects that “Hope was a bird too light for the NKVD to shoot down” (Sepetys 168), evoking a vision of resistance that cannot be shackled. Even in the face of starvation and death, the assertion that “They owned our bodies, but not our minds. Not yet” (Sepetys 175) reclaims mental autonomy. Foucault’s heterotopia does not erase the possibility of human agency; rather, it reveals the paradoxes within enclosed systems—how the very architecture of control can be subverted through imagination. Thus, the imagined worlds created by Lina and her fellow prisoners become both refuges and weapons—counter-heterotopias where survival is not just biological but also ideological and emotional.

The Gulags as “compensation heterotopias,” were said to be places created to address perceived flaws or dangers in society. Foucault gives the example of

"compensation heterotopias," like the "puritan colonies" in 17th-century America and "Jesuit settlements in Paraguay" by mentioning that,

The daily life of individuals was regulated, not by the whistle, but by the bell. Everyone was awakened at the same time, everyone began work at the same time; meals were at noon and five o'clock, then came bedtime, and at midnight came what was called the marital wake-up, that is, at the chime of the churchbell, each person carried out her/his duty. (8,9)

These were efforts to create perfect, utopian societies. Similarly, the Gulags were created to create a "meticulous" society. In reality, the Soviet regime viewed the Gulags as tools of control for the population that they thought was a threat to them, aiming to change the behaviour of the internees into obedient citizens who would support the Communist state's goals. In BSOG (2011), Lina remembers,

Papa talking about Stalin's confiscating peasants' land, tools and animals. He told them what crops they would produce and how much they would be paid. I thought it was ridiculous. How could Stalin simply take something that didn't belong to him, something that a farmer and his family had worked their lives for? "That's communism, Lina," Papa had said. (105)

This example clearly shows the mindset of Stalin who wanted a compensation heterotopia where everything worked according to the set rules that were to be followed without any questioning. The Soviet authorities build the Gulags to silence the individuals and maintain their grip on power. The Gulags are meant to compensate for the regime's fear of losing control, serving as a way to enforce strict order and conformity among the population.

When we look at brothels and colonies as examples of "heterotopias" (special kinds of places), we see they have conflicting aspects. Brothels are places where people break away from regular social rules to seek forbidden pleasure. Colonies, on the other hand, are tied to exploration, power, and wealth. Both give an impression of freedom and excitement, but they actually hide the truth of exploitation, oppression, and violence, similar to what happens in Gulags. According to Agier, people living in these marginal or unusual places face

complex interactions and conflicts, showing how intricate these spaces on the edge of society can be. He talks about the identities of these people by mentioning that

They do not come down to the ethnic or racial identities often assigned to them a priori or in media or political commentaries. In a general way, they become the places of 'the rest' and of the limits, and they are part of a world history, each in its national or regional form being in some way redefined and 'replayed' everywhere by the process of a globalisation more visibly inegalitarian. (24)

In the context of the Gulags, comparing them to colonies is especially powerful. The Soviet Union justified taking over large areas by claiming it was for progress, development, and spreading socialism. But beneath these idealistic claims was the harsh reality of forced labor, displacement, and the oppression of native peoples.

According to Foucault, "heterotopias of illusion" show how the world we live in can sometimes be different from what we perceive and reveal the problems we have within our societies. The Gulags were made to reform people who were seen as a threat to society. But this was just an that overshadowed what was really happening inside the Gulags. People were forced to do labor and live in harsh conditions. The Soviet state claimed that they made a perfect socialist system, but in reality, it was totally opposite. The Gulags were kept under high surveillance where everything was about discipline, order, and labour.

The Gulags are the best examples of what Foucault calls illusion and compensation heterotopias. The Soviet Union promised reform, but behind those promises was a cruel system built to induce fear and oppression among the internees. What looked like centers for rehabilitation were actually places of violence, suffering, and control. These spaces were created to silence any people who were thought to be against the Soviet policies. When we look at the Gulags through the ideas of Foucault and Agier, we start to understand how powerful people can shape spaces in ways that seem ideal on the surface but actually hide the ugly realities underneath.

Seeing the Gulags through this lens—of illusion and compensation—helps us see the huge gap between what the state promised and what people actually experienced. Foucault's ideas, along with Agier's work on how people live in the margins of society, help us understand how the Gulags actually worked. These weren't just prisons—they were places where truth was twisted, and yet, people's strength and resilience still shone through. The worlds people created in their minds—through hope, memory, and resistance—allowed them to survive. This shows how the Gulags were not only about control and suffering, but also about how people managed to stay hopeful in the darkest of times.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This chapter is the conclusion of this research, which was conducted to analyse the selected novels, highlighting the concept of Gulags as heterotopias, internment and displacement, struggle and resistance, and identity formation. The main focus of my analysis is to highlight the Gulags as heterotopic spaces where individuals who are displaced from their homes struggle to survive through acts of resistance and community formation. The novels are *Between Shades of Gray* (2011) by Ruta Speteys and *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes* (2019) by Guzel Yakhina. I used a qualitative approach and applied Stuart Hall's textual analysis method. The theoretical framework uses the theory of heterotopia by Michel Foucault and Michel Agier, Alexander Solzhenitsyn's work *The Gulag Archipelago* (1973) was also included to discuss the real experiences in the Gulags, forming the foundation for addressing the two research questions presented in Chapter one of this thesis.

By exploring the selected texts through the lens of heterotopia, we gain an understanding of the spatial and social elements present in sites like the Gulags. Through Foucault's conceptual framework and Agier's theoretical contributions, we are able to look at the ways in which these spaces challenge traditional forms of confinement and resistance, highlighting the nature of human experience in times of adversity. This analysis shows the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in studying narratives of trauma and resilience, offering a fresh perspectives on the enduring stories of historical trauma and the human capacity for survival and resistance.

In chapter two, I collected various researches related to my work and wrote a through literature review, analyzing all the works that have been done already and found the research gap that my study fills.

In chapter three, I highlighted the theoretical underpinnings that are used to analyse the selected texts. In Foucault's framework, heterotopias are real places that exist apart from all other spaces, reflecting, challenging, and inverting the spaces they mirror. These are spaces of otherness, where society's usual rules don't apply, allowing alternative social orders to emerge. Gulags serve as heterotopias due to their

physical and social isolation, their function as sites of punishment and control, and their ability to combine several conflicting spaces within one location. Michel Agier deepens this concept by highlighting the varied uses and meanings within these spaces, capturing the complexity and diversity of modern heterotopias. This perspective is essential for exploring the lived experiences of people in these extreme environments, where power, space, and identity intersect in complex ways.

In chapter four, my analysis focused on both the texts, *Between Shades of Gray* (2011) and *Zuleikha Opens her Eyes* (2019) where I systematically explored the outlined research questions. The primary objective was to comprehensively explore the Gulags as heterotopic spaces and their impact on the internees that lead to acts of struggle and resistance as well as community building and identity formation.

Gulags as spaces of crisis and deviation show how all the characters are stripped of their homes and sent to the Gulags highlighting the experience of internment and displacement. Furthermore, it points to the transition between the past and present self. It also lays stress upon the transformative power of the Gulags that answers the first question of my research aiming to explain how the main characters in both the novels, Zuleikha and Lina along with the other characters develop and shape their identities facing the harsh realities in the Gulags in order to survive. Zuleikha's transformation is evident when she enters the Gulags, even though she is the victim of dekulakization, she finds a new self in the Gulags that gives her more authority over her decisions and actions. Moreover, her son Yuzuf goes through the process of maturation in the Gulags and turns out to be an intellectual young man. Similarly, Lina is seen to develop into a mature girl who builds new connections as the plot further develops.

Additionally, the spaces of emplacement and displacement highlights the experiences of internment in both the texts. It shows the oppressive nature of the Gulags and how the characters survive in them under strict surveillance and control.

The Gulags as heterotopis of juxtaposition answers the second question of my research, the Gulags juxtapose several incompatible elements together. Agier's emphasis on the multiplicity of uses and meanings within heterotopic spaces is evident in both novels. The Gulags have multiple roles: they are sources of sustenance, spaces of danger, and places for spiritual reflection and connection with with

each other. For Zuleikha, the forests and riverbanks are sites of both loss and renewal, where she learns to survive and find moments of peace amidst the brutality of internment. Zuleikha makes new connections and the characters work together as a community to survive in the Gulags.

For Lina, the harsh environment of the Gulags becomes a space where she finds many connections and resists conforming to the Soviet's ideals. Despite the characters coming from different cultural and social backgrounds, their forced coexistence within the labour camps reveals the contradictory nature of such spaces. The settlement, in this sense, acts as a microcosm of heterotopia, reflecting multiple layers of experience. Within the Gulags, acts of resistance and struggle not only help the prisoners survive but also help them build a shared sense of community and purpose.

Another important aspect is the role of time, which plays a significant part in the concept of heterotopia. In *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes* (2019), the story takes place over several years, beginning in the 1930s Soviet Union. Zuleikha's journey from her village to the harsh Siberian settlement closely follows the historical timeline of Stalin's forced relocations. However, what's more important is how Zuleikha experiences time herself. At first, time feels endless and cruel, symbolizing her feelings of despair and powerlessness. But as she adapts to her new life, her relationship with time changes—it begins to carry hope and reflects her emotional growth and resilience.

This idea of subjective time is also present in *Between Shades of Gray* (2011), where Lina's story is told through a mix of present events and flashbacks from her life before the deportation. These back-and-forth shifts in time show how the trauma of displacement creates a disconnect between the past and present. At the same time, they show how Lina tries to hold onto her memories to stay grounded and preserve her identity.

The principle of Opening and Closing in heterotopia is also clearly visible in these texts. The labour camps have strict systems and rules that regulate daily life and reflect the broader experience of control and restriction. This controlled access plays a major role in how individuals experience internment. Similarly, the principle of Illusion and Compensation is relevant here—what is promised by those in power

often turns out to be misleading. The supposed ‘rewards’ or reasons for displacement usually benefit the authorities, while the individuals affected have little or no choice in the matter.

By focusing on how individuals survive and adapt within these heterotopic spaces, we can better understand the nature of agency and resistance in oppressive environments. Moments of adaptation, subtle rebellion, and endurance reveal how even in the harshest conditions, people can still find ways to assert their identity and connect with others. These examples help us reflect on how personal strength can emerge from shared struggle and adversity.

In short, the main argument of my research is built around using the concept of heterotopia to critically study how Gulags are represented in *Between Shades of Gray* and *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes*. Drawing from Foucault’s ideas, Agier’s theories, and close literary analysis, I aimed to create an interdisciplinary conversation that connects philosophy, anthropology, literature, and history. This kind of approach not only deepens our understanding of historical trauma but also brings out the many layers involved in stories of confinement and survival.

6.1 Recommendations for Further Research

Future studies can take this exploration further by looking at a wider range of texts—like poetry, short fiction, and plays—that also deal with the themes of displacement and confinement. Comparing works from different cultural and historical contexts can reveal both shared experiences and unique insights into how heterotopic spaces operate across time and place.

Additionally, applying the idea of heterotopia to modern issues—like migration, refugee camps, and prisons—could help us see how these spaces function in today’s world. Foucault and Agier’s concepts can offer useful tools to think about how space, power, and exclusion affect people now, and what this means for justice and human rights.

In-depth case studies focusing on specific heterotopic spaces within Gulags or other sites of confinement could examine how these spaces functioned as sites of power, resistance, and identity negotiation for individuals and communities. Investigating reader responses to narratives of internment and displacement could

explore how readers interpret and engage with representations of heterotopia in literature, involving empirical research methods such as surveys, interviews, or focus groups to understand the impact of these narratives on readers' perceptions and empathetic understanding.

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APPENDIX A

Dear Friend,

The writings and drawings you hold in your hands were buried in the year 1954, after returning from Siberia with my brother, where we were imprisoned for twelve years. There are many thousands of us, nearly all dead. Those alive cannot speak. Though we committed no offense, we are viewed as criminals. Even now, speaking of the terrors we have experienced would result in our death. So we put our trust in you, the person who discovers this capsule of memories sometime in the future. We trust you with truth, for contained herein is exactly that-the truth. My husband, Andrius, says that evil will rule until good men or women choose to act. I believe him. This testimony was written to create an absolute record, to speak in a world where our voices have been extinguished: These writings may shock or horrify you, but that is not my intention. It is my greatest hope that the pages in this jar stir your deepest well of human compassion. I hope they prompt you to do something, to tell someone. Only then can we ensure that this kind of evil is never allowed to repeat itself

Sincerely,

Mrs. Lina Arvydas

9th day of July, 1954---Kaunas (Sepetys 337)