

## Outsourcing, Imperialism, and Power: Master-slave Dialectic in Rimini Protokoll's *Call Cutta in a Box*

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### Abstract

This paper investigates how offshore outsourcing, as represented in Rimini Protokoll's site-specific play *Call Cutta in a Box*, is a metaphor of the Hegelian Master-slave dialectic. Offshore outsourcing corporations, like Descon Limited, employ Indian call center operators and force them to have intense training to neutralize their thick Indian accents and mask their GPS location to defraud European customers at the other end of the line. Language and Information Technology have been used by these global corporations to enslave Indian workers and to provide a service of high quality to European customers. The paper seeks to find answers to the questions: How is offshore outsourcing an important phase in the trajectory of the imperialistic hegemony of the West over the East? How did colonialism impose the English language on Indians to turn them into mere servants to their purposes? How does the hierarchical power structure cause immense stress on Indian call center operators? How do the Indians payback by mastering Information Technology, thus gaining 'recognition' and 'independence' from the masters? What is the function behind using a call center in Kolkata as a site-specific theatre?

**Keywords:** *Rimini Protokoll, Call Cutta in a Box, Master-slave dialectic, outsourcing, site-specific theatre*

### Introduction

This paper expounds on Hegel's Master-slave dialectic (*Herrschaft und Knechtschaft*), explaining how it provides a framework for understanding the site-specific play *Call Cutta in a Box* (2008) by the German theatre group Rimini Protokoll. The Indian call center operators in Kolkata are employed by the multinational corporation Descon Limited<sup>1</sup> to serve European customers or

‘experts’<sup>2</sup> at the other end of the line. These jobs are often offered to Indians and other youths from developing countries because they are paid less than their European or American counterparts. This is known globally as offshore outsourcing. It later transpired that Indian call center operators were subjected to intense training on certain English dialects to neutralize their thick Indian accents and on Information Technology (IT) and social indoctrination to do GPS location masking to defraud the European customers into buying a commodity or using a service.

### **Review of Literature**

This research paper is charting new waters that no other study has ventured to wade. Other researchers have overlooked to study the play from the lens of the Master-slave dialectic. Previous studies can be divided into three parts. The first is about the autobiographical experiences of European customers who participated in the play such as the Guardian journalist Gideon Lewis-Kraus who described his experience in his article “The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.” Matt Cornish, an American scholar in the field of performance studies, took part in one of the performances of the play and wrote an article titled "Chat Room" in which he discussed the influence of the German director Erwin Piscator and Bertolt Brecht on *Call Cutta in a Box*. The second part of the studies focuses on IT and its influence on the play. In her article "Some Musings on Iterations and Encounters," Tina Bastajian investigated the performance as “a nomadic and ephemeral locative media project,” (2008, 1) where technology controlled every aspect of it. In another article titled “Rimini Protokoll's Theatricalization of Reality,” Frederik Le Roy expressed how Stefan Kaegi saw technology and theatre as inseparable in the work of Rimini Protokoll and the replication of reality. The third part focuses on the reality and the documentation in the play. Meg Mumford discussed in her article “Rimini Protokoll's Reality Theatre and Intercultural Encounter: Towards an Ethical Art of Partial Proximity” the idea of placing real people not actors on stage. The same idea is also tackled in the book *Performance, Politics, and War on Terror* by Sara Bradly who investigated the “Theatre ready-mades” in which Rimini Protokoll goes beyond the documentary theatre to create a real theatre by real people, not actors.” In her book *Contemporary British Theatre: Breaking New Ground*, Vicky Angelaki elaborated on the use of real people as she asserted that Rimini Protokoll always sought to “invite people with genuine expertise or experience in some area onto a stage to talk about their life and work. Josefina Komporal, in her book *Radical*

*Revival as Adaptation: Theatre, Politics, Society*, commented on the recruitment of non-professional actors as “blurring the boundaries between real and performed experience and the company creates performances with ‘found’ stories by found ‘actors’ around a pre-established topic” (Komporaly 12-3).

### **Objective**

In this paper, I argue that offshore outsourcing is an extension of imperialism where the multinational corporations use language and IT to enslave Indian operators and provide a high-quality service to European customers or (the masters). It is evident that the West relies on the “Third World labour markets through the chains of the international division of labour, and national comprador classes.” (Bhabha 18). The comprador is the medium of dealing between foreign corporations and local people whose function is “to recruit, train, and manage the local labor required by the capital” (Boussebaa 1153). There are some conditions which make the comprador an important person such as “Barriers of language and social customs [which] made the employment of the comprador a necessity and, as he has become virtually the manager of the foreign firm, his responsibilities and duties have increased. (“THE CHINESE COMPRADOR” 670). Therefore, mastering the English language grants enormous power to the comprador, creating “language-based hierarchies of power and privilege that existed in colonial times” (Boussebaa 72).

In this context, Hegel’s Master-slave Dialectic offers grounds for understanding the factors that lead to the formation of the Master-slave hierarchy in a power relation between Indian call center operators and European customers and what affects its progress. Accordingly, I propose that Indian call center operators are the new slaves who are employed by multinational corporations to serve and scam European customers (the new masters).

Using Hegel’s Master-slave Dialectic, this article presents several questions that must be tackled: How is offshore outsourcing an important phase in the trajectory of the imperialistic hegemony of the West over the East? How did colonialism impose the English language on Indians to turn them into mere servants to their purposes? How does the hierarchical power structure cause immense stress on Indian call center operators? How do the Indians payback by mastering Information Technology, thus gaining ‘recognition’ and

‘independence’ from the masters? What is the function behind using a call center in Kolkata as a site-specific theatre?

The plot of the play is linear-structured; however, it is set simultaneously between many time zones around Europe and India. The prologue starts with European customers walking in the streets of Berlin, Wroclaw, Zurich, or Brussels and getting instructions via mobile phones. They use cars that guide them safely and quickly to their interactive theatre-like offices equipped with the latest state-of-the-art telecommunication devices. Meanwhile, Indian operators use crowded and dilapidated transportation means such as auto-rickshaws (tuk-tuks) between places and are stacked in small cubicles in big halls. Now, the colonial past rears its ugly head: European cities are modern and have decent transportation, whereas India, after many decades of liberation from colonization, is still reeling under poverty, overcrowdedness, and a bad transportation system. Once European customers get in, the telephones ring and they start talking with Indian call center operators in Kolkata, India. Indian operators chat according to a script, but they can also improvise. They seek to break the ice with European customers by chatting about their names, ages, jobs, favorite foods, Indian deities, vegetarianism, and incarnation. They play games and narrate personal stories via their computers. Gradually, they start to get friendly and intimacy develops between them. In the epilogue, the operators disappear, and the computer’s monitor flashes a final message: ‘Descon Limited thanks You for attending this call.’

### **Methodology**

To understand how Hegel’s Master-slave dialectic is used as a framework for understanding *Call Cutta in a Box*, it is crucial to grasp how Hegel conceptualizes mastery and slavery in his book *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). Master-slave dialectic reveals that the human self is born in social interaction, through a process—a struggle—for recognition. Hegel posits that the essence of the dialectic is the existence of two opposing self-consciousnesses: one becomes the master; the other becomes the slave; one is very powerful and dominant; while the other is weak and subservient, as Hegel asserts: “They exist as two opposed shapes of consciousness; one is the independent consciousness whose essential nature is to be for itself, the other is the dependent consciousness whose essential nature is to live or to be for. The former is lord, the other is bondsman<sup>3</sup> (Hegel 115).

The lord and the bondsman sought to prove themselves through a “life-and-death struggle” (Hegel 113-4). The bondsman enters a state of “thinghood” in which he loses all his qualities and adopts the style of the lord, as Hegel asserts that the bondsman strives “to possess his independence in thinghood” (115). The bondsman has to work hard to achieve independence from the bondage of the lord, as Hegel states “Through work, however, the bondsman becomes conscious of what he truly is” (118). Afterward, a sort of symbiotic relationship between the two is realized and the bondsman and the lord reach a “recognition,” as Hegel states, “The individual who has not risked his life may well be recognized as a person, but he has not attained to the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness” (114). In this manner, the bondsman achieves “independence” and he no longer needs the lord in his life.

I will use the grammar of Hegel’s Master-slave dialectic such as ‘lord,’ ‘bondsman,’ ‘thinghood,’ ‘work,’ ‘recognition,’ and ‘independence’ to provide a framework for the understanding of the play. In the following sections, I will examine how offshore outsourcing is an extension of the imperialistic hegemony of the West over the East from a historical perspective. I will also expose how linguistic imperialism and Information Technology are the old-new tools of imperialism. Besides, I will investigate the hierarchical power relations in these Indian call centers. Finally, I will highlight the technique of the play to indicate how the choice of a real call center in Kolkata is the best location for the play.

### **Offshore Outsourcing and Imperialism**

Historically, the modern conflict between the East and the West started with colonialism from the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. After World War II, the British empire promised to give India and other eastern colonies their independence in return for mobilizing their resources at the war. By the mid-twentieth century, the West had stopped the colonial military campaigns and replaced them with imperialism. Imperialism came after colonialism but it focused more on the economy and achieving “unlimited expansion that alone can fulfill the hope for unlimited accumulation of capital” (Arendt 18). This expansion is secured through technological supremacy which allowed the West to export technology to the East. Economically, the West had used technology in mining, agriculture, and industry to exploit the developing countries. Starting from the 1990s, the West, through its huge networks of multinational corporations, was in dire need of many services at competitive

prices and with few taxes. Offshore outsourcing was the answer: multinational corporations handed the business to a third party vendor who “would only operate a similar service in a similar way, but with a margin on top” (Kobitzsch 71). Outsourcing offshored thousands of jobs to India and other developing countries—jobs that would have remained in Europe, Australia, and the United States. In India, outsourcing “originated in the mid-1990s when American Express, British Airways, and GE Capital established customer support operations and transaction processing services” (Taylor 267) and it tackled the post-purchase services in almost various fields. The economies of the developing countries in Asia and Africa had benefited greatly from offshore outsourcing.

Young and prospective Indians, dreaming of economic betterment, seek to work in these call centers all over Kolkata. They have to enter into a state of “thinghood” in which they are subjected to intense training and indoctrination processes to master IT and the required English accent. Therefore, the applicants’ proficiency in the English language is the most important asset. This leads us to the discussion of linguistic imperialism and its vast influence on call center operators in India.

### **Linguistic Imperialism**

Drawing on the work of Johan Galtung’s typology of imperialism, Robert Phillipson, in his book *Linguistic Imperialism* (1992), posits that linguistic imperialism is a “sub-type” of cultural imperialism and defines it as “the dominance of English...asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages” (51).

In India, there was a cultural inequality between the Sanskrit and the English language. The British colonialist Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay stated that “historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgments used at preparatory schools in England” (228). It was evident that the Sanskrit language was not respected by the British colonialists. Moreover, Macaulay also despised the Indians and described them as “a class of interpreters between us and the millions we govern—a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect”

(49). This is a clear indication of how the colonizers look at the other's language and culture.

Lord Macaulay, whose opinions had been motivated by his racial prejudice against Indians, imposed teaching the English language on Indian students in all Kolkata's schools in 1846. India, as part of the Third World countries, was enslaved by a set of economic, political, and military structural relations which made it more dependent on the First World countries for economic and political survival in the global capitalist system.

Despite the imposition of the English language on all Kolkata's schools since the mid-nineteenth century, Indians always complain of having a thick Indian accent. Multinational corporations provide prospective Indians with rigorous language training to "neutralize accents, to make sure that agents do not speak with Indian inflections" (Taylor 275).<sup>4</sup>

Before training, prospective Indian operators are embarrassed by being 'silent' on the telephone. In the colonial discourse, 'silence' or the inability to speak the English language, on part of the Indians or other nationalities, is always equated with "dumbness" or the inability of "sophisticated intellectual labor" (Nair 305). In *Orientalism*, Edward Said pinpointed the issue of 'silence' when he quoted Gustave Flaubert's words to Louise Colet about the former's love affair with Kuchuk Hanem,<sup>5</sup> "the Oriental woman is no more than a machine; she makes no distinction between one man and another" (Said 187). Even the great English poets of the nineteenth century like Rudyard Kipling and Horace Hayman Wilson were racist when they "echoed words like 'dumb' even in connection with those considered by convention the 'wisest' in the caste hierarchy of the Hindus, namely the Brahmins" (Nair 305).

This explains why Indian call center operators are very keen to learn the different dialects of the customers to avoid being 'dumb.' In the play, they work under the pretense of being Australians, with fake Australian pseudonyms and fake bank accounts just to defraud Australians at the other end of the line thanks to their fluency in speaking the English language and a variety of its dialects.

To keep the pretense, Indian call center operators use also Australian pseudonyms in their chats with Australian customers, as Sunayana, an identified Indian call center woman, reveals in her chat with a European customer. She swivels her camera to let the European customer watch what life looks like in this

Indian call center in Kolkata. The European customer watches rows and rows of Indian operators in their booths chatting. Sunayana confides a secret to her that her coworkers are making "sales in Australia, selling mobile phones," and they "pretend that they are Australians" (Protokoll).

Even more, these Indian operators use a certain script with European customers so they can scam the gullible people based on their age, ethnicity, education, and the type of the advertisement appeal that works out with them, as Zaiontz asserted: "These performance practices prioritize a collision between art and site that is facilitated by spectators who are scripted as assistants to, and participants of, artistic creation and production" (169).

### **Hierarchy and Power Relations**

There is a hierarchical structure of power at the Indian call centers which limits the authority of each group, e.g. the "Anglo-American clients reside at the top—they basically dictate the terms of engagement and impose "pure" English as the norm"; Then, the "compradors who earn their place first by going through English-medium schools and then by meeting the expectations of their clients"; Finally, the Indians whose "English remains "tainted" by mother-tongue influences" (Boussebaa 72) are the unluckiest group. They constitute the majority of the call center operators who end up doing the hard work under severe conditions of being badly paid, under surveillance, and with no or little hope for career advancement. They also have to put up with daily harassment from the European customers, as when an old disgruntled European customer, in the play, suddenly gets emotional when he knows that the operator is from India and says, "I'm alone, very alone. Come here as in the film, Hindi cinema, you fly here. Let's get married" (Protokoll). The Indian operator just smiles and carries on without complaining.

In addition to the daily harassment, Indian operators have to abide by erratic, mandatory, or overtime schedules, and "strict attendance and adherence policies as well as constant monitoring and surveillance in the call center" (Fabros 70). Therefore, the employer pressures the vendor who pressures the operator on the other side, but it is the operator who has to take all the blame for any mistake in the end. This explains also why these ordinary Indians are very polite and apprehensive when dealing with European customers, as Sunayana explains:



INDIAN OPERATOR. Okay, if you find the customer not fitting the profile that you need, you say, thank you very much for all, and we can see what we can offer you, so let's get back to you soon. You understand what we are doing here, we never say "thank you, you're not what we wanted" we always leave the door open. So, we can always come back in. So we can have a reason to call him back later.

EUROPEAN CUSTOMER. Do you ever get bored on (*Sic*)your work?

INDIAN OPERATOR. Oh, can you imagine! I talk to somebody new every other minute. Maybe I talk to six new people an hour.

EUROPEAN WOMAN. But you always have to be very polite and very fresh, but what if you have a very bad day?

INDIAN OPERATOR. I don't know, but it's like I switch on and off. I put my headphones on and I make the call and once the call started I am totally a different person. (Protokoll)

Indian operators have to keep the 'door open' and never get bored or nervous when talking to a European customer. They turn to be mere bondsmen whose job is just to serve and appease their lords at any price. They are transformed into the state of "thinghood" by leaving behind all their qualities and just adopting the qualities of the lords. However, They find themselves between the rock and the hard place: they face abuse from customers whom they wish to appease by all possible means, and from their employers who have no mercy on them.

In an example of how Indian operators adopt the qualities of the lords, Indian operators use the webcams to zoom in on pictures of some people. Then, it turns out that these pictures are of servants who work for Indian operators. One of the Indian operators employs a housemaid at their homes, another employs a cook, as an Indian operator says, "Yes, she is my housemaid, she cooks for us, so she is a nice lady" (Protokoll). Despite abject poverty, the servants (Indian operators) are employing other Indians to be their servants, in a way to imitate the British aristocrats. This is a perfect example of acculturation when Indians merge their own culture into another culture "to form a cohesive culture" (Lacity 36). Therefore, Indians find themselves in a quandary between their native Indian culture and the culture of the Europeans they are serving in these call centers.

The Hegelian concept of ‘work’ is shown in *Call Cutta in a Box* where the Indian operators strive very hard to serve the European customers. As a real test for their mettle, Indian operators have to meet certain metrics at the end of every month, otherwise, the vendors, who are responsible before the employers, will be punished for not meeting the metrics, as Fabros explained, “So for each metric that the vendor is not able to meet, at the end of the month, the amount that they should get for the service will get penalized and reduced by this much” (75). Consequently, the vendors will cut the salaries of the operators likewise.

These salaries are very low in comparison with that of the average annual income of any worker in the US. Jisha Menon explains the wide gap between the salaries:

The salaries for call-center employees are dramatically lower in India. For example, if an employee in the US is paid an annual income of \$22,000 to \$32,000, (an hourly wage between \$10–\$15/hour) her counterpart in India will make roughly \$5,000 per year (about \$2/hour.) This considerable difference in salary, adjusted against the "fully loaded cost" to company per employee, creates net savings for the company in the range of 60%-70% per employee providing the impetus for outsourcing. (166)

In the age of globalization, multinational corporations earn a lot of money from the business of offshore outsourcing, as Mary C. Lacity asserted that “the global outsourcing market has grown to exceed combined revenues of US\$ 1.1trillion by 2018” (57-8). This enormous success enables them to open new markets in many developing countries around the world.

### **Information Technology**

Technology, the other arm of imperialism, has allowed the Indians to know everything in the lives of the Europeans starting from weather forecasts, traffic jams, currencies, local news of these communities, and the timing of the local matches, despite being thousands of miles away. They can control much equipment in the make-shift offices of European customers. It is thanks to the advancement in the field of telecommunications that allowed for increased integration between nations throughout the world and also of multinational corporations, not only in First World countries but also in Third World or developing countries such as India and the Philippines. According to a study by Paulo Roberto Gião, he sees that some innovations in the field of IT have direct implications on the costs of the corporation such as “the automated call

distribution (ACD), audio response unit (IVR) and voice over IP (VoIP)...the development of CRM tools which stands for customer relationship management” (236). There is also a significant drop in the cost of internet service providers. Consequently, call centers have shown constant evolution as time passes. As a result of this, call center business flourishes across India and in many developing countries.

In *Call Cutta in a Box*, the power of technology is shown in controlling every piece of equipment at the make-shift offices of the European customers. Indian operators can turn on the kettle, the printer, the fax, the webcams, and the computers. Europeans just sit, relax, and start a friendly chat with the Indians over mobile phones.

EUROPEAN CUSTOMER. I don't think it (the kettle) works because I've tried to turn it on before you call.

INDIAN OPERATOR. Okay, don't do anything.

EUROPEAN CUSTOMER. Now, it works!

INDIAN OPERATOR. Yeah, it's waiting for me, you just need the Indian touch. (Protokoll)

In another scene, an Indian operator is well-aware of the time zone difference between Kolkata, India and Berlin, Germany, “But you know if I look out of the window right now; it's really dark outside because my watch says it must be around 11 pm or 11:05 pm to be precise” (Protokoll). By the end of the play, intimacy develops between them, and the Indian operators put the clocks forward at the offices of Europeans so "they can be together" (Protokoll).

Indian operators' identity is concealed from the other European customers not by the theatre mask as in the time of Shakespeare, but by the IT techniques which function as the new theatre “mask.” Information Technology enables Indian operators to mask and fake their GPS location to other places so European customers are satisfied. Lewis-Kraus asserted that Indian call center operators could "answer any question regarding maps, newspapers, and photographs of Perth, Australia. These operators have never been to Perth, Australia" (14). This is mainly because Indian providers and offshore corporations have the assumption “that providing services from India produces huge consumer opposition” (Taylor 273).

This pretense is part and parcel of the work of Indian call center operators, as Helgard Haug, one of the directors of Rimini Protokoll, asserted:

the callers had to slip in[to] roles, had to pretend being someone else, get an English or American name (according to the market they were serving Shuktara became for example Sandy), pretend to be in the direct neighborhood by knowing the results of the recent football or soccer-game and chat on the weather and when they made a deal, the other callers were giving applause. (2)

Applause or clapping is a show of appreciation for success in striking a deal, selling an item online, or reaching the target metrics. It happens in the theatre when the audiences clap as a form of praise to the actors. The journalist Gideon Lewis-Kraus documented his participation in one of the performances of *Call Cutta in a Box*, as he wrote:

I ask why there is clapping, and she (the Indian operator) says that she was proud of herself for knowing Kerouac and at that moment had put our conversation on the loudspeaker at Descon Ltd and that her colleagues were clapping both because it was great that she knew Kerouac and because they liked my Big Sur moment. (14)f

On the other hand, clapping is also a sign that the privacy of European customers is breached since Indian operators do not keep the details of their conversation secret from the other coworkers: they broadcast it to them through headphones and to the vendor too, who is standing in the middle, keeping an eye on everyone. The reason behind this gross invasion of privacy is Indian operators' desire to show appreciation to each other for the efforts exerted, to document a success story, a business deal, or to boast about their knowledge of the American culture. This drives us to discuss the technique of the play with regards to disguise, site-specific theatre, the overtheatricality of the play, and symbolism.

## **Technique**

It is known that Rimini Protokoll uses real people, not professional actors, in all its performances, as Daniel Wetzel, one of the three directors of Rimini Protokoll, confirmed in an interview that “Rimini Protokoll has brought its "theatre of experts" to the stage and into city spaces, interpreted by non-professional actors who are called "experts" for that very reason” (2). Helgard Haug, Stefan Kaegi, and Daniel Wetzel founded Rimini Protokoll in 2000 and

have since worked in different constellations under this name. They have collaborated in many unconventional, site-specific theatre shows in many cities around the globe where they used real characters and technology to reach out to audiences in different environments (Malzacher 191).

Dubbed an “Intercontinental Phone Play,” Rimini Protokoll’s directors use real people, not professional actors, to create “a performance piece that reflects on the increasing interconnectivity between people, businesses and cultures in a globalized world” (Le Roy 154). Florian Malzacher asserted that “Rimini Protokoll uses theatre as a medium to bring ordinary people to the stage, people who would otherwise be audience members but more likely left out of the theatre altogether” (82). For the audience, they become “conscious of the effect of their observation and the different ways they can look at it” (Le Roy 156).

Using real people in a play breaks the identification of the actors. In theatre, identification is achieved when the actor “gets into the skin of the character” (Pavis 176). Identification causes pleasure as “if one had entered into another body” (Nietzsche 64) or catharsis. Since the play achieves neither; it belongs to the director’s theatre, where the director is taking the leading role.

Site-specific theatre is “an active component in the creation of the performance meaning, rather than a neutral space of exposition or scenic backdrop for dramatic action” (Pearson 70). Site-specific directors always use an alternative urban space outside the traditional theatre and attempt to engage the experience of “site” with their work’s content. Historically, theatre originates in nature, not in the proscenium theatre, as Martin Puchner asserts:

Greek tragedy originated in religious sites, around the altars to the God Dionysus. Japanese Kabuki theatre, by contrast, originated in the dry riverbeds of Kyoto, a place of disrepute. In London, the Globe Theatre, along with most other theatres, was forced to take residence outside the City of London on the South Side of the Thames. (65).

Therefore, site-specific performance has resumed the old tradition of going back to nature. It strives to emancipate theatre from the locale by going out of the auditorium and the proscenium arch to the “social situations or architectural contexts, both used and disused” (Pearson 205). Site-specific theatre is not new; it had been used many times before, as Patrice Pavis noted:

Examples are Evreinoff and his reconstruction of the taking of *The Winter Palace*, Copeau and his mystery plays in *Beaune and Florence*, *Theatre du Soleil* and their renovations of the Catoucherie for each new production; the *Royal de Luxe*, the *Fura dels Baus et Brith* (GOF), who specialize in rerouting places and the staging in their imagination. (338)

Another example is Jean Genet's *The Screens* which is about the failure of the French military colonialism of Algeria. The play was staged in a real graveyard near Paris as "a method for bringing the war in Algeria into the heart of Paris itself, of letting it loose in the streets" (Kaye 53). The technique of site-specific theatre had been used in many plays by Rimini Protokoll such as *Outdoors* (2011), *Situation Rooms* (2011), *Uncanny Valley* (2019), and *Feast of Food* (2020). In *Outdoor*, audience-participants trace the choir with their iPods and headsets to their rehearsal through the streets of Aberystwyth. The choir and the audience soon develop a sense of intimacy due to the "shared long walks, cups of tea, and songs with the members of the Choir as an ethnographic strategy to find out and understand their innermost stories and bonding to Aberystwyth" (Pons 120).

Consequently, in this globalized and technological stage, the aesthetics of theatre has changed from the old traditional theatre of catharsis, identification, and contemplation to chatting, using real characters, and technology.

The function behind using a call center in Kolkata reveals the inner workings of the globalized city of Kolkata where hundreds of Indians scramble to find a job in one of these places. It also engages the audience or the customers into the play by directly interacting with the Indian operators via the IT. Thus, transforming the audience from a captive audience into an active voyeur who follows the performance through webcams and is engaged in commenting, chatting, recommending, or criticizing the show.

Symbolism also plays a major role in the play. The words of the title of the play "Call Cutta" and the City's name "Kolkata" are homonymys since they have the same pronunciation but denote different meanings. The meaning also denotes that the city has been transformed into a big call center. The motto of Descon Limited is "Redefining Dependability" (Malzacher 81) as if the corporation presents a fancy world for Europeans (the lords) who are just asked to sit, relax, and receive all the services they want from the bondsmen. "Dependability" is a negative word that has undergone a semantic amelioration where it is elevated to

mean luxury and power. This motto accentuates the lordship of Europeans against the bondage of Indians.

Disguise, through GPS masking, “overtheatricalizes the acting” (Pavis 108). From the beginning, everything is well-planned: scripted conversations, anglicized names, fake locations, neutralized accents. These Indian applicants are meticulously handpicked by the vendors who work for big multinational corporations, like Descon Limited, whose only aim is to achieve a huge profit by any means.

During the friendly chat, we find out that Indian operators are closely monitoring European customers through many CCTVs and webcams. Therefore, European customers are “under the gaze” (Pavis 108) of the Indian operators who are watched by the vendors. So, the observers are being observed and this resulted in the metatheatricality of the performance. There are layers of reality and there is no real friendship or intimacy.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, my overall research question has been to prove how offshore outsourcing is a cycle in the trajectory of imperialism. To answer this, I have raised several sub-questions that helped me to organize the understanding of how Hegel’s dialectic of lordship and bondage exposes the link between offshore outsourcing and imperialism. A reading of the context using Hegel’s dialectic reveals how the Europeans and Indians represent lords and bondsmen. It also investigates how the Indians have been transformed into a ‘thinghood’ and achieved through hard ‘work’ the ‘recognition’ and ‘independence’ from the Europeans.

Furthermore, offshore outsourcing has opened up a discussion of globalization and multinational corporations in the twenty-first century. Descon Limited is an example of the multinational overseas corporations that belong to no land and pays allegiance to nothing but material profit. It trained and indoctrinated Indian call center operators on language and IT to defraud European customers, thus proving to be a continuation of the imperialistic hegemony and power. Linguistic imperialism is one of the multiple dimensions of imperialism that has been highlighted in the interaction between Indian call center operators and European customers. As language had played a major role in the former British colonies, language is essential in offshore outsourcing. In call centers,

Indians are trained to use westernized pseudonyms and neutralize thick Indian accents to sell a service or a product via the telephone.

Another important weapon of imperialism is Information Technology (IT). It is used, along with language, to “construct their (people’s) culture from the national text translated into modern Western forms of information technology, language, dress.” (Bhabha 38). The mastery of the technology by the Indians is highlighted in the domination over the Europeans through monitoring the European customers, switching on and off the appliances from afar, and masking their real locations, thus controlling everything in their lives.

Colonialism had created a hierarchical structure in the Indian society which had been reflected in the call centers, widening the gaps between Indians. Nevertheless, Indians work hard and exploit IT to control the lives of the Europeans and strike deals with them, thus achieving the Hegelian hypotheses of ‘recognition’ and ‘independence.’

In this paper, *Call Cutta in a Box* (2008) exposes that lordship and slavery still exist and even more they are still controlling the relationship between the East and the West. Indians used language and IT, the same old weapons of colonialism, to manipulate and control the west. The advancement in Information Technology is evolving at an immeasurable speed and theatre will be at the forefront of exploring, questioning, and exposing the merge between theatre and technology and the aesthetics of this new genre.

## **Endnotes**

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<sup>1</sup> Descon Limited is a multinational corporation, which has “15 workstations in Salt Lake City of Kolkata, and a satellite township and IT hub built on a reclaimed salt-water lake in the city of Kolkata in West Bengal” (Menon 167).

<sup>2</sup> Rimini Protokoll's director Stephen Kaegi uses the word "experts" to name European customers who receive phone calls from the Indian call center operators since each one of them is an expert in his/her field. However, I prefer to use the word "customer" since it connotes that the relationship between the two is basically economic.

<sup>3</sup> Hereafter, I will use ‘lord’ and ‘bondsmen’ in keeping with Hegel’s terminology, instead of ‘Master’ and ‘Slave’ despite the fact they were used interchangeably in literary scholarship on Hegel. In the original German book *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, the original translation of the words “*Herrschaft und Knechtschaft*” is ‘lordship’ and ‘bondage. It should be noted that "slave" is a mistranslation of "knecht" which means servant or henchman in German. In French, it was Alexandre Kojève, the French philosopher and translator, who made the central message



of Hegel's book in terms of the Marxist theory of social conflict, so words such as 'Master' and 'Slave' were mistakenly translated due to being "influenced by the French terms 'Maître' and 'Esclave' in Kojève's original" (Charlston 15).

<sup>4</sup> Accent alteration is a very popular training course not only for the candidates working at multinational corporations but also for the young students at language schools and prospective employees at global consulting firms, as Vandana Nath states:

On 16 June 2010, the website *naukri.com*, a popular recruitment portal in India, had nearly 3000 vacancies for accent trainers in offshored Indian call centres. Prospective trainers are expected to 'remedy' regional Indian accents and to make agents sound 'globally acceptable' by training them to achieve a 'neutral', US or UK accent. Many companies recruiting frontline call centre staff through *naukri.com* list their desired candidate as possessing a western or 'trainable' accent. Burgeoning private schools and individual consultants in the country that offer language training to aspiring call centre employees further reinforce the ideals of possessing the 'skills' of accent modification. (711)

<sup>5</sup> Kuchuk Hanem was a dancer whose fame came from her sexual liaison with the French novelist Gustave Flaubert who wrote about her in his letters and from the notes of the American adventurer George William Curtis.

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التعهد، الامبريالية، والقوة: جدلية السيد والعبد في مسرحية كلكتا في صندوق  
لريميني بروتكول .

المستخلص

يُسَلِّطُ البَحْثُ الضَّوْءَ عَلَى التَّعْهِيدِ خَارِجِ الحُدُودِ كَمَا ظَهَرَ فِي مَسْرَاحِيَّةِ المَوْقِعِ المُحَدِّدِ كَلِكْتَا فِي صُنْدُوقِ لريميني بروتكول كمجاز عن جدلية السيد والعبد لهيجل. حيث توظف شركات التعهيد خارج الحدود، مثل شركة ديسكون المحدودة، عمالاً هنوداً في مراكز الاتصالات وتجبرهم، لاستمرار عملهم، على تخفيف الكنتة الهندية الثقيلة وتغيير الموقع الجغرافي لهم ليسهل لهم خداع العملاء الأوربيين على خطوط التليفون الدولية وبالتالي يسهل اقناعهم أنهم اوربيون مثلهم لتسويق بضائعهم. وهكذا غدت اللغة وتكنولوجيا الاتصالات سلاحين أساسيين في تجنيد العمال الهنود في مراكز الاتصالات لتقديم خدمة رخيصة الثمن للعملاء الأوربيين. ويهدف البحث إلى الإجابة عن الأسئلة: كيف أصبح التعهيد خارج الحدود حلقة من حلقات هيمنة الغرب على الشرق؟ كيف فرض الاستعمار تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية على الهنود لخدمة العملاء الأوربيين؟ كيف استحال العمال الهنود في سلم طبقي وتكنولوجي يسبب الكثير من الضغوط عليهم ويسبب صعوبات في الاندماج مع مجتمعاتهم؟ كيف أن إتقان اللغة و التكنولوجيا يسبب "ادراكاً" و "استقلالية" للهنود ضد اسيادهم الأوربيين كما جاء في نظرية هيجل؟ ماهي آلية استخدام مسرح الموقع المحدد في كالكتا؟

الكلمات البحثية: ريميني بروتكول، أتصل بكتا في صندوق، جدلية السيد والعبد، التعهيد، ومسرح الموقع

المحدد.