

**Understanding the JEE Aspirant/College Student Experience:
Exploring power dynamics, everyday realities and social constructs**

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I. INTRODUCTION

Neitzsche in his book *The Birth of Tragedy*¹ writes about the distinction between the Apollonian and Dionysian art forms. The Apollonian represents a calm, reasoned, and structured form of art, often associated with the Greek god Apollo. On the other hand, the Dionysian represents a deeply emotional and ecstatic form of art, often associated with the Greek god Dionysus. Here, I would like to borrow vocabulary from Neitzsche²; and redefine Apollonian and Dionysian. Neitzsche also talks about the dreaming life and waking life. Here, I say that Apollonian life is the life we live under the gaze of State/Authority/Command/Ideology. It is the so called ‘waking-life’ which we live on autopilot³. The remaining life which we live for ourselves is the ‘dreaming-life’; the life of a dysfunctional member of the society.⁴

It is the state that gives legitimacy to ones life. But why does state need to meddle with everyday lives of its subjects? I propose that for the state to function; Othering of identities needs to happen. All our social structures are structures of hierarchies. One can negotiate to it, compromise with it but cannot be outside of it. I shall be discussing these thoughts in more detail using the events in the life of JEE Aspirant/College Student and use frameworks and tools given by Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony,⁵ Henri Lefebvre and Christine Levich in *The Everyday and Everydayness*⁶, Othering of identities in Veena Das’s ‘*Life and Words*’⁷, Giorgio Agamben’s *Bare-life*⁸ and *Public Secrets*.

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*.

2. ;although I disagree with this stark bifurcation

3. ;an uncritical life, doing as what is mandated without thought

4. ;coincidentally this thought process has already been given by Giorgio Agamben in his book *Homo Sacer* and I will be discussing that as well.

5. Thomas R. Bates, “Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony,” *University of Pennsylvania Press*.

6. Henri Lefebvre and Christine Levich, “The Everyday and Everydayness,” *Yale University Press*.

7. Veena Das, *Life and Words* (university of california press;).

8. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer* (Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data).

II. ANALYSIS

Everydayness of someone no longer human

Agamben in his book *Homo Sacer*⁹ asks whether a human being can be reduced to a physical body. He says that every individual has two lives; the ‘bios’ or the political life/legitimized social life¹⁰ and the ‘zoe’: the animal life/bare-life; given by God, which is sacred and defined by the fact that one is an animal and must eat/sleep/procreate,^{11,12}. Consider the case of a JEE Aspirant who has taken a drop, who is not associated with any public institution. His everyday-lived role in his field is not that of a student or a citizen¹³; but that of a child to his parent. He is untethered to the State; and is considered a failure, an outcast, a human rejection.¹⁴. It is as if my human-ness is not innate to me but seems to be coming from my sleep time and my work hours and me being used to capitalistic means of production and maximizing shareholders’ value. A man without bios is a No Longer Human,^{15,16} he is an animal.

But why does the State need to do this? Because all social constructs want to maintain their hierarchy. As long as you are within its realm, this is done via Ideological State Apparatus,¹⁷ via hegemony, via indoctrination. A man untethered to the State becomes dangerous, and therefore needs to be delegitimized, and this how, assumes a position lower than the social structure he just abandoned. The hierarchy remains unchallenged.

9. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*.

10. the Apollonian life of order, control

11. the Dionysian life of a wild man

12. ;just like my disagreement with the distinction between Apollonian and Dionysian; I also do not completely agree with the stark difference between them and believe that at one point the boundaries blur; the role of State is assumed by someone else; God, father, The-Ego-Self, public institutions. Like body-mind distinction; am I my mind controlling my body or am I my body holding the mind?

13. ;here I am defining a citizen as one who does value addition to the State. Since a JEE dropper cannot do that substantially, he is a citizen in name and not in role

14. late stage capitalism cannot allow respect to Bilbo Baggins

15. I felt the book *No Longer Human* by Osamu Dazai fits perfectly well with this description

16. Osamu Dazai, *No Longer Human*.

17. Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London), 1971,

Hegemony in Fields

The difference between personal and professional life is a facade¹⁸; the Individual remains the same in the two. Yet, we acquire different roles in different fields¹⁹ to maintain separation of concerns, to still cope up with alienation we have from our labour. There is a performance. Now each field comes up with its own social structures and its own order. And our level of compromise with each is different.

Take for example, the act of smoking cigarettes on campus. In itself it is a harmless act of inhaling tobacco. The Administration meddles with the daily trivial activities just to stay relevant. One may compromise/resign to this by smoking inside the college campus secretly/smoking in front of guards just outside the campus; but this conflation of the original simple act to an act of resistance/non-normative reinforces the hegemony of evils of smoking. Because even counter-hegemonic acts mean you conform with the ideology. While reacting to a norm²⁰, one is still engaging with it.

Turn it up a notch and one may proclaim “I do not really care” as they smoke cigarettes in the open inside campus; they will still be liable to the repercussions and hence in one way or another, be subjects to the same hegemony they were revolting against. And if all tools fails, the Administration holds the ultimate too to get one expelled; strip the bios and reduce them to Homo Sacer; a bare-life without agency, a nobody;²¹ because although I as a student may have right to express, right to freedom; I fail to have ‘**right to have rights**’. Our bios is what ensures us these.²²

Public Secret of Smoking Cigarettes

At all three levels²³, we are subjects to the state/administrative. But even at the level-1 of smoking secretly, it is not that we have fooled the state/admin. Because the act of public smoking is a Public Secret. In fact it

18. just like the difference between bios and zoe

19. Lefebvre and Levich, “The Everyday and Everydayness.”

20. ;does not matter if the reaction is positive or negative

21. about whom nobody cares whether they drink or smoke

22. Agamben says that if this sounds totalitarian, it is because it is totalitarian. He says that every democracy is totalitarian because according to him, the power to become totalitarian makes you one

23. 1, smoking secretly; 2. smoking publically inviting repercussions; 3. an expelled student

is through public secrets, I feel that the state and its subjects negotiate power. Presence of public secrets gives wiggle room to both the parties. A complete crackdown on anti-social activities on campus will also invite demands of better standards of living from the subjects. But is this a true negotiation? Because no matter what the public secret is; the dominant social structure remains. In fact it is this dominant social structure that informs the public secret.

Extent of Othering

I gave the example of how one may feel the thrill of having subjugated the admin/state by smoking in front of the guards just outside the campus. I also discussed about roles in different fields. So are not guards also putting up a performance? For when and how did they become the embodiment of the State? And at what point climbing up this hierarchy, does the State become real; become pure? Veena Das in her work *Life and Words*²⁴ talks about how there is no innate identity in oneself. And how these tags are empty signifiers. And more often than not, one thinks of his own identity equipped with agency and complexity; the Other is reduced to a silhouette, a being devoid of form, a subject of blanket statements. The Self and the Other is a spectrum. The guards as the grassroots of the State/Admin as not as Other to us as the others. It is known how often times guards tolerate if not completely the act of students.

During my engineering at IITJ we have had various fests and events; where we could see this Othering materialize in front of our eyes. We need an Other to motivate us, to guide us. And we need an Other much different from us; so that we do not mistake to humanize them. Spandan, which was supposed to be an Inter-Hostel Cultural Fest always used to boil down to a Girls v/s Boys fest²⁵. For Inter-hostel sports fest, this crown of the Other used to land on Post Graduates. In fact, we used to see Othering in flavours of language one spoke or whether one used reservation to get into college. Anything other than a **B.Tech Undergraduate Upper Caste North Indian Boy/Man** could and would become the Other.²⁶ The starker the difference; the sterner the Othering.²⁷

24. Das, *Life and Words*.

25. a rather ugly one in fact; with crass taste and casual sexism

26. reasons? Ghettofication, access to public sphere to name a few

27. ;resistance to this Othering is futile; because the hierarchical structure was dictated using stereotypes; any reaction would only reinforce them. But so does the submission. Hence, we have a self-replicating ideology in place

III. CONCLUSION

The analysis delves into the intricate dynamics between individual identity, societal roles, and hegemonic structures within the context of institutional settings, particularly educational institutions. Drawing upon Agamben's concepts of *bios* and *zoe*, the discourse examines how individuals are defined by their relationship to the state and social structures, highlighting the precarious position of those who exist outside traditional societal roles. Through examples such as the JEE aspirant and the act of smoking on campus, the narrative elucidates the ways in which individuals navigate and negotiate their identities within hegemonic systems, where even acts of resistance can reinforce existing power structures. The notion of public secrets is explored as a mechanism through which power dynamics are negotiated, underscoring the complex interplay between the state and its subjects. Furthermore, the analysis reflects on the extent of othering within institutional contexts, illustrating how hierarchies and stereotypes perpetuate the marginalization of certain groups, thereby perpetuating a self-replicating ideology.

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