

Risk Society and Nation State: Agatha Christie's Espionage Novels

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Abstract

Although known as a popular detective novelist, Agatha Christie also wrote several espionage novels mainly featured with entangled plots of spy agents working under the cover of secret intelligence organizations in a trans-national world. Novels like *They Came to Baghdad* (1952), *Destination Unknown* (1955), and *Passenger to Frankfort* (1970), resemble one another and share a basic premise concerning not only espionage story plots but also what Ulrich Beck calls a risk society. In Christie's these novels, a new social reality affected by multi-national capitalism and technologies of medical science, gene biochemistry and even nuclear weapon gradually turns the global world into an uneasy and unstable situation. More importantly, the reactionary protest and demonstration of rebellious youth or social masses, terrorist's sabotage in urban cities, and capitalist's multinational investment of new energy presented in her works also cause the "risks" that endanger the stability of a nation state. These various risks and circulation of transnational capital in a global culture adumbrated in Christie's novels in the twenty century seemingly foreshadow repetitive social unrest (including Neo-Nazi movement and nuclear crisis) in our present era. Why does Christie punctuate this critical awareness of the risk society and transnational world in her espionage novels? How can these "risks" within a social reality and the power of capital money threaten the consolidation of a dominant order or a governmental regime of the nation state? These issues will be covered and examined in this paper.

Keywords: risk society, nation state, espionage novel, Agatha Christie, transnational capitalism

Christie's Espionage Novels in an Age of Risk

Several Christie's espionage novels, mainly written from 1950s to 1970s, demonstrate a theme of risk society and nation state within a trans-national world,¹ which Ulrich Beck regards as a turning point of society changing from a pre-industrial society, then an industrial society, and finally to a post-industrial risk society.² Seen in Beck's light, the post-industrial risk society actually covers the field of the examination of a globalizing process in recent years since 1990s. Written in a postwar era, an age dominated by a high development of industrialization, Christie's espionage novels, like *They Came to Baghdad* (1952), *Destination Unknown* (1955), and *Passenger to Frankfort* (1970), portray a particular relationship between the risk society and the nation state that complicates the traditional or normal perceptions of space and time in that period. The risk society presented in her novels seemingly corresponds and foretells a similar social reality and globalization in an age of a trans-national world in our time.

In these three Christie's spy novels, there are anonymous and rich bankers or chiefs of secret trans-national organizations support the sabotage, terrorist attacks, and research of destructive and disastrous technologies (like nuclear weapons and genetic engineering) with a fluxing circulation of capital money that crosses national border in order to cause commotion and unrest to nation states all over the world. Moreover, a new "non-binary" world order manipulated by ambitious masterminds rising from a confusion and unrest of a trans-national world situation can be also found in these Christie's novels. Besides, these Christie's espionage works adumbrate a high development of industrialization and prevalent capitalism as well as a transitional social reality under an impact of the expanding trans-national capitalism and more advanced technologies, like biotechnology and computer technology, which may even cause social disorder and fatal disaster to human life and civilization.

Nevertheless, these various risks and circulation of transnational capital in a global culture adumbrated in Christie's novels in the twenty century seemingly foreshadow repetitive social unrest (including Neo-Nazi movement and nuclear crisis) in our present era. Why does Christie punctuate this critical awareness of the risk

¹ Several Christie's novels written in 1950-70s unfold the early development of globalizing process; yet, compared with the recent development of advanced computer technology and complicated ethnicity issue, Christie's presentation of trans-national world under the impact of industrializing process and prevalence of capitalism can only be regarded as a portrayal of a burgeoning and primary development of globalization.

² Ulrich Beck, in discussing the rise of a risk society from an industrial society, defines three distinctive epochs; they are "pre-industrial society" (traditional society), "industrial society" (first modernity) and "risk society" (second/new modernity). See his "The Reinvention of Politics: Toward A Theory of Reflexive Modernization." Eds. Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash. *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*. Cambridge, Politic Press, 1994, 1-55.

society and trans-national world in her espionage novels? How can these “risks” within a social reality and the power of capital money threaten the consolidation of a dominant order or a governmental regime of the nation state? Agatha Christie’s detective novels have been explored by many literary criticisms; yet, most of the criticisms are the studies of narrative forms and structuralism on her detective fictions and few studies are concerned about her espionage novels and, most importantly, her foreshadow of a risk society and a boundary-free world of capitalism in our time. This paper aims to use a different approach, instead of a traditional genre study, to examine Christie’s works.

The impact of prevalent capitalism and social unrest on the national bureaucracy presented in Christie’s espionage novels evidences the emerging of Beck’s “risk” society. Novels like *They Came to Baghdad*, *Destination Unknown*, and *Passenger to Frankfort* resemble one another and “share a basic plot premise concerning the existence of a wealthy megalomaniac determined on world domination or anarchy” (Osborne 271). Christie’s wealthy and megalomaniac capitalists, using their multi-national circulation of capital, support secret organization in order to subvert nation states and disrupt the national stability. Ernest Mandel, in discussing espionage novels, observes that “the general public became aware of a new sort of ‘crime,’ one directed not against individual lives and property, but against the state” (60). The spy story, to him, is “an offspring of the detective story” (Ibid.). If detective stories highlight a solving process of personal crimes mainly within a national space, espionage novels accentuate that of international crimes within a trans-national space, a space which deviates from traditional perceptions of border lines drawn by nation states.

The later development of Christie’s detective novel in 1950-60s seems to focus more on the questioning of the modern national bureaucracy.³ This querying undertone can breeds the rise of the espionage novels which “seeks to interrogate the integrity of nationalistic fantasies in the international arena” (Thomas 275), owing to the fact that espionage novel often punctuates a setting, in which the national government is sabotaged by undercover agents or is confronted with the global trend of changing politics and economics. Namely, compared with detective novel, the espionage novel, instead of characterizing detectives, is featured with spies or secret agents who probe into or deal with the crimes against nation-state or nationally organized crime against other nation-states in a trans-national arena. Viewed from this

³ Some of Christie’s characters in novels, like *Hickory, Dickory Dock* (1955), *Cat Among the Pigeons* (1959), *At Bertram Hotel* (1965), and *By the Pricking of My Thumbs* (1968), involve in some espionage activities and secret intelligence services controlled by national bureaucracy. These plots pave the path for Christie’s critical awareness of the consolidated order of a national government and forewarning of rising political unrests of a transnational world in her later writing of her spy novels.

angle, the nation-state becomes a central issue in espionage novels and in a period especially when the consolidation of a nation-state is gradually deteriorated by a trans-national circulation of capital and by various invading “risks” generated from nuclear weapon, ecological crisis, gene technology and frenzy riot of masses in big cities all over the world.

Christie’s delineates a new way of seeing and understanding the interrelation of a risk society and a nation state in her postwar espionage novels. The risk society threatens the “security” of and causes destructive war to a nation state. These three Christie’s novels portray a world under the terror shadow of Cold War between U.S. and Soviet Union. This balance of power (or terror) at that time leads to a sequential rise of an age of risk, in which a “New World Order” is established by a “new American Realism”⁴ (Coker 12) during a period of Cold War between these two opposing worldly hegemonies. Written in the postwar era in the twentieth century when U.S. and Soviet Union are still under a sustained state of political and military tension, her espionage novels foreshadow a rising risk society and a new world order in a globalizing process, an era like our contemporary global world situation, in which fundamental beliefs of normal spatiotemporal practices or even the dominant control of the national bureaucracy can be contingently invaded and become more and more uncertain and insecure.

Christie gives a new sense of “space” by delineating a bounder-free diffusion of capital circulation and social movements in her espionage novels. She also presents an alternative prospect of “time” through her particular comprehension of human history. This new perception of space and time presented in her postwar risk society can represent some of the socio-cultural dynamics which arise from the later development of an industrial society and gradually turn the society into a risk one. The rise of the risk society somehow downplays the traditional perception of space and time and the security of a nation state. Anthony Giddens, corresponding with Beck’s discussion of “risk society,” explores as well this new stage of social reality (or what he calls a post-traditional society) and its impact on the nation state. To Giddens, the tradition “is closely bound up with authority” (82) in a dominant and official perspective of human history. His traditional “authority” can be linked to Beck’s disciplinary and rational control in a “fundamentalism”⁵ of the spatiotemporal practices of everyday

⁴ This term is also from Christopher Coker’s book. It refers to a contemporary global society in which U.S. government deal with the world situation and cooperate with other countries (ex. the issue of terrorist’s attack) to maintain the national security after the era of Cold War with the Soviet Union. See his *War in an age of Risk*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009. pp. 9-12.

⁵ Both Giddens’s “tradition” and “authority” somehow can be associated with Beck’s disciplinary and rational control in a “fundamentalism” of everyday life, which is internalized by social masses as a daily routine of normalized life practice. Beck’s second phase of a post-industrialization development of a risk society, to Giddens, turns into a “post-traditional society.”

life manipulated by the nation state.

“Militant Particularist” and Nation State

David Harvey, in examining the urban life in big cities, emphasizes an interconnection of social movement with urbanization. An urban city can symbolize a space occupied by a powerful socio-political center. What is more, owing to the competition of free market economy, utilitarianism and individualism prevail in an urban city. This enables “the personal [(to) become] political” (Harvey, 207) and makes possible an urban social movement. The cities, therefore, ensures a room for a “localized collective action in the urban sphere” (205). Harvey regards urban social movement, or the collective action of “militant particularist” in many local cities, “as sources of social change or even of urban life” (206). In wake of Harvey’s thought, the outbreak of urban people’s discontent in cities (especially in a capital city, the place of a political power center of a national government) forms a “militant particularist movement” (193) that disrupts the security and consolidation of an urban city and a nation state.

In Christie’s espionage novels, college students’ social movement in big cities around the world stands for the reactionary force of the “militant particularist.” David Seed observes that the reason why espionage novel rises in the 1960s is probably because of the fact that “popular anxieties [are] growing over the credibility of government processes” (115). That is, the espionage novels often characterize social masses’ collective mistrust of national governance. In Christie’s depiction, students’ collective and radical means of expressing their discontent and distrust of a government actually creates social risks that endanger the stability and the overall control of a nation-state.

Besides students’ riot, the terrorism and sabotage attacks in cities in Christie’s risk society indicate another radical development of social violence. The urban city, as mentioned previously, symbolizes a national or local consolidation of a decision-making bureaucracy. To those militant terrorists or mob engaged in radical and social movements, producing “frustration, disturbance and eventual violence” (Hamilton 87) in urban cities can be regarded as many militant particularists’ “favorite” place of subversion where the rational and disciplinary control of a governmental center may be overthrown. The urban city gradually turns into a terrorist’s attacking target and a place for massive mob’s demonstration. The urban life, therefore, becomes vulnerable to terrorism, and “the more urbanized a country is, the more vulnerable it becomes to sabotage” (Hamilton 1). This phenomenon also illustrates how people’s discontent and social unrest threaten the consolidation of the

national bureaucracy. In Christie's novels, the people's discontent and social unrest start from the younger generation; especially the students' enrage over the bureaucracy of the nation state.

In *Passenger to Frankfort*, Stafford Nye, the young British diplomat who seeks to unearth the mysteries of a scheme about an international social movement, finds out that a female financier with "incredible sums of money" (138), using student's reactionary anger, supports a group of international young students to overturn national governments all over the world by their radical means of social movement. Harvey actually observes that "[m]ilitant particularist movements must either reach out across space and time to shade broader political-economic processes or. . .become embedded in some integrated and broad-based process of historical-geographical change" (2001, 193). In wake of Harvey's thought, the student's reactionary movement in *Passenger to Frankfort* can form a "militant particularist movement" which crosses the national border and entails social movements especially under the process of industrialization and urbanization in the postwar age. In this regard, Christie's "rebellious youth" (139) can be coalescent with Harvey's "militant particularists" who feel discontent and upset about the normalized and disciplinary control of the national bureaucracy. Stafford Nye is later informed by his great-aunt that "student unrest is just one flower on the tree. It's blossoming everywhere and in every country" (68). Actually, these students transform their inward discontent and unrest into outward international violence, including attacking embassies, fighting and resisting the police, go marching and shouting to social public "in Rome—in Milan . . .like a pest everywhere in Europe" (82).

Christie actually presents the outbreak of students' rebellion starting in urban cities like Rome, Milan, Paris, Berlin, Prague and many others in her spy novels. To Harvey, the urban city interconnects with the rise of social movement. As mentioned earlier, industrializing process and prevalence of capitalism lead to the rise of urban city and turn it into a political/economic center. Most important, the competitive free market and capitalist's accumulation of capital in the urban cities nourish the spirit of laissez-faire and individualism. This individualism in urban cities enables the "personal" to be "political" and opens the path for a localized collective action in an urban sphere, or an "urban social movement" (Harvey, 2001, 205), which first challenges the administrative bureaucracy of local cities government and then successively violates the central national bureaucracy in a capital city, broadly spreading its seed to other (capital) cities in the world.

Sabotage in Urban City and Nation State

Generally speaking, Christie's espionage novels highlight the association of radical social movement with urban city. In *They Came to Baghdad*, the president of United States and of Soviet Union, "the men who represented the two predominant ideologies of the world" (259), meet in the city Baghdad to discuss the issue of nuclear weapon and the future of the world. However, a group of terrorists and students, supported by the international money of a "third party" organization, intend to assassinate these two presidents and produce sabotages and commotions in Baghdad. Christie uses the Cold War time background to emphasize the possible and horrible consequence and impact of nuclear war shadow on nation states all over the world. Her choosing the Muslim city Baghdad where the two rival groups, the U.S. and the Soviet Union in Cold War, are trying to reach a peace agreement in the twentieth century seems to by some means or other foretell the contemporary post-Saddam Iraqi government, which attempts as well to pursue peace and to end the anarchy state of the capital city—Baghdad. To Christie, Baghdad is an international and urbanized city encompassing "[a] crowded main thoroughfare thronged with people, cars shooting violently, people shouting, [(and)] European goods for sales in shop windows" (99). However, the "hybrid European styles" (100) of the urban city Baghdad⁶ becomes the terrorist's target of a sabotage attack just like the current situation of the urban city Baghdad in the twenty-first century.

Peter Hamilton argues that "overcrowding and urbanization create a need for a vast bureaucracy machine" (87), so an overcrowding and urbanized city like Baghdad turns into a center of a vast bureaucracy for making decision of national and even international politics. The president of the United States and of the Soviet Union can embody two top "decision-makers" in an international society during the Cold War period. Baghdad, the capital city of Iraq and a city where an international conference held for making decision of the world politics, can function as an urban center of a national and international (though not for a long time) bureaucracy. Yet, Hamilton punctuates "the vulnerability of urban life to terrorism" (85) due to the fact that terrorists regard causing violence and terror in an urban center as a producing of frustration and disturbance to a national bureaucracy. Christie's student's demonstration and terrorist's sabotage, with the financial support from a trans-national circulation of capital money, really cause disturbance and violence to the (inter)national security.

A New Order of the World and Trans-national Capital Money

⁶ Baghdad, under the impact of the culture of western countries, gradually becomes international and urbanized city since the League of Nations established British Mandate over Iraq in 1920.

Fabricating a bilateral conference of two worldly super hegemonies, the U.S.-Soviet summit conference, with a real time background of Cold War at that time, Christie expresses a new perspective of a historical event in her novel. What is more, if we read again her espionage novels, we can find a similar risk society and the world situation at her time repeating themselves in our contemporary time. Seen in this perspective, she seemingly creates a sense of uncertainty by presenting a historical event based on an ambiguous “hybridity” of half-fiction and half-reality to her readers. Christie’s partial-fictitious and partial-real dealing of her contemporary historical event constitutes a double-edged reflection of both repetition of and differentiation from a historicizing process of an official record of “history.”

An uncertain historical event, vacillating between fiction and reality, can defy an authorial understanding of the history. Christie’s mentioning about the historical event of the death of Hitler and his incognito son may exemplify an uncertain event in human history that is without being officially verified. In *Passenger to Frankfurt*, Dr. Reichardt, an authoritative historian, states his historical standpoint of Hitler’s death:

“It has often been rumored that Hitler was alive, not dead. There is no one who has ever said with *certainty* that they have examined his dead body. The Russian declared so. They brought no proofs, though.”
(203 emphasis mine)

This historian actually possesses an uncertain and interrogating attitude toward the historical “fact” about Hitler’s death.⁷ Here, Christie suggests that a past authorized “truth” is now questioned by a present and different perspective. In addition to the survival Hitler, she even uses Hitler’s incognito son as a fictional character whom is idolized by the rebellious youth (students) of a trans-national New-Nazi organization. Her critical consciousness of the well-known “official truth”⁸ about Hitler creates a present and alternative understanding of the past history. In this regard, her “personal” interrogation of a historical event challenges the traditional assertion of a formulaic truth. This quest for a personal and political “truth” not merely deviates against the official history but also becomes the impetus to what Harvey calls a “militant particularist” movement, in which personal and political power of seeking the “truth” may act as a counterforce to a dominant social order of a national bureaucracy.

In *They Came to Baghdad*, *Destination Unknown* and *Passenger to Frankfurt*,

⁷ The generally accepted cause of the death of Adolf Hitler is suicide by gunshot and cyanide poisoning. Some mysteries and clues about this event enable some people to believe that he may have survived after the end of the World War II.

⁸ “Hitler’s death” is “testified” and “officially “confirmed” by Russian KGB as a widely accepted “official truth.”

there is always a rich capitalist behind an underground organization who serves as a criminal mastermind and “personally” manipulates a trans-national political rebellion in order to overthrow the national bureaucracy in a global world. Christie’s Superman-like capitalist really affects the world situation by his personal influence. This personal power of political force can be considered as a Beckian source of risk that can bring about cultural dynamics and changing perceptions and contingently “encroach” the consolidation of a nation state in a risk society.

In *Passenger to Frankfort*, Matilda, Stafford Nye’s great-aunt, may serve as Christie’s persona and embodies an old traditional thinking about the young people, especially the students. She conveys her worrisome about the student’s personal power of agitation in a risk society to her nephew by pointing out the “destructive” danger of their international and reactionary movement, saying:

“Something is going on—something is brewing. Not just in one country. In quite a lot of countries. They’ve [(the students)] recruited a service of their own, and the danger about that is that it’s a service of young people. And the kind of people who will go anywhere, do anything, unfortunately believe anything . . . They’re not creative, that’s the trouble—only destructive.” (72-73)

The students’ social movement, sponsored by international money of a banker, starts the fire of revolution which spreads across geographical borders and expands to other nations across the globe. These massive rebellious students form an international alliance and launch radical campaigns, which are featured with “the Young Siegfried motif” (58), an allusion from Wagner’s opera.⁹ Christie has already presented this motif of young Siegfried earlier in *They Came to Baghdad*, in which the heroine Hilary Craven is infatuated with a young and radical revolutionist who aims to reform the world and regards himself as one of “the young Siegfried of the New World” (243). He even states that all young “[believe] in their destiny as Supermen” (Ibid.). Almost twenty years later, the youth’s ambition of creating a new order of the world falls upon some students’ mind in *Passenger to Frankfort*. To these students, the young Nordic hero Siegfried becomes their idol and sacredly connects with the young son of Hitler.¹⁰ For this reason, this international student syndicate turns into an alliance of “young Neo-Fascists” and “big Youth Federation,” calling themselves “the

⁹ Siegfried is a legendary dragon-slaying hero in the Middle High German epic poem. Richard Wagner bases on this character to compose his music drama which bears the same title.

¹⁰ Basing on an anecdote of the incognito son of Hitler and a beautiful Arian girl, Christie writes a historical event about Hitler and his son, which is not testified by historian, into her espionage novel.

Super-Arians” (166) and hoping to become “Supermen”¹¹ and Neo-Nazi followers. Using the rebellion of the young generation as a motif, Christie not merely heightens a new sense of “transnational” space but also underscore a new perspective of “historical” time.

The alternative perspective of history is instanced by her young “Super-Arians” in *Passenger to Frankfort* who idolize Hitler’s son, a young man who is excluded from an official history, as their world savior. Christie’s putting non-testified historical event (son of Hitler) into her novels creates a sense of uncertainty toward the chronological history but simultaneously implicates a possible process of forming an alternative history. More accurately, her re-examination of Hitler’s death and his Nazi movement opens a different path to scrutinize human history.

In *They Came to Baghdad*, Christie’s character embraces a different perspective of the contemporary world situation at that time. Mr. Dakin, the head of British bureau of intelligence in Iraq, forecasts that a new order will be springing up from the Cold War period:

“There are two divergent points of view dominating different parts of the world; that is true enough. And they are represented loosely in the public mind as ‘Russia and the Communists’ and ‘America’. . . Therefore, everything depends on those who hold those two divergent viewpoints . . . Certain things led one or two people to believe that this activity comes from a third party or group working under cover and so far absolutely unsuspected by the world at large.” (129)

Dakin’s divergent viewpoints stand for a traditional logic thinking of binary opposition. Yet, his transcendental cognition of “third party” force connotes a new horizon of the world situation that transcends the binary groups of nation states after the Cold War period. This is substantiated by his remarking that “[t]here is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so” (128). By her character’s words, Christie unfolds her retrospective consciousness of the “traditional” and dichotomous thinking by posing a non-binary “third party” in her work whose aim is to establish a new order out of the traditional world.

In *Passenger to Frankfort*, the personal but destructive power of the youth stands for this “third party,” which does not side with either one of the bilateral belligerent states, the U.S. and the Soviet Union, in a Cold War period. The goal of the “third party” is to ignite student’s revolutionary energy in the cities all around the

¹¹ Wagner and Nietzsche are actually known to each other. Wagner’s “Siegfried” can be reasonably associated with the influence of Nietzsche’s philosophy of “superman.”

world. What indirectly gives impetus to this trans-national movement expanding to other cities in the global world is the financial support from a trans-national circulation of mysterious capital money that goes beyond the physical barriers of space and time. In this novel, “the power of money” (101) enables the social multitude to feel a “sense of risk” (141). What hides behind this “mysterious business” of social movement is the “money now circulating around [(the world)]” (157), forming “international money” or “worldwide money” (94-95). Christie’s ambitious capitalists appropriate the international money to support underground organization members who intend to subvert a national bureaucracy and to arouse trans-national commotions. In fact, writing this novel in 1970s, she notices the trans-national circulation of money through international trade and economical development at that time. Her young British diplomat, Sir Stafford Nye, observes that “European Common Market” has rendered “the interrelationships of countries” (81) to be more and more complicated owing to the multi-national and boundary-free trade and business.

David Harvey notices the issue of “circulation of money capital” (1989, 196) in a trans-national sphere. He actually suggests that the overflowing capital money has expanded beyond human’s traditional perception of space in a national sphere. Christie indeed points out the fact that the “mighty power of money” can affect the international politics and economics. In *They Came to Baghdad*, Mr. Darkin observes the fact that a trans-national network of finance is manipulated by a mysterious multimillionaire banker to subvert several national governments in the world, uttering:

[T]here are large sums of money involved and although very cleverly and artfully camouflaged, there is definitely something wrong about where the money comes from and where it is going. A great many unofficial strikes, various threats to Government in Europe. . . (130)

Mr. Darkin’s words manifest his alternative regard of the international money and the circulation of money on a trans-national horizon. This circulation of money stands for a “diffusion” of capital flux which extents across national border and leads the nation state to be kept out of its national governance by a boundary-free network of capital circulation.

Nuclear Modernity and Other Risks

Under this world situation in Christie’s description, the cause of various risks

has something to do with the boundary-free circulation of capital, which casts a shadow of the trans-national crisis of politics, economics, and ecology. Besides these potential dangers, another destructive “risk” presented by Christie is the nuclear weapon. In *Passenger to Frankfort*, one of the high-ranking French officials talks to another official about the impact of nuclear weapon on their country, saying:

“Nuclear weapons? *Quel Blague!*¹² What can we do with nuclear weapon? What would become of the soil of France, of the air of France, if we use nuclear weapons? We can destroy Russia, we know that. We can also know that Russia can destroy us.” (157)

His comment on nuclear weapons suggests that the using of creative nuclear weapons may cause a “risk” leading to a “self-destruction” of their national “authoritarian force.” (157). Similarly, Mr. Lazenby, a British diplomat, points out the severe national disaster induced by this sort of fatal weapon:

“Nuclear weapons?” suggested Mr. Lazenby.

“Don’t you monkey with *that!* You don’t want a radioactive England, do you, or a radioactive continent, for that matter?” (170)

Judging from these French and British governmental officials’ words, the nuclear weapons not only *engender* international warfare but also *endanger* the ecological environment of the world. They really form a fatal threat in a risk society and bring about massive unrest and panic for the people and even the government of a nation state.

Some “technologically-constituted hazards” (Adam 8) can be caused by advanced technologies. If advanced scientific technologies, like nuclear weapon, can induce global terror and a destructive war, the risk is reasonably “associated with science and technology” (Hudson 169). Yet, the science and technology result in a double-edged consequence of both progression and destruction to human life and even civilization. They pose a vital threat to the stability of a nation state. The nuclear weapons, in this sense, can be viewed as technologically-constituted hazards that bring disaster especially in a risk society of a nation-state. Based on Beck’s thought, Alan Irwin views scientific knowledge of nuclear weapons and nuclear industry as “nuclear rationality and modernity” which “are indeed extremely close to one another” (83). The risk society, especially the one spawned by nuclear weapons, actually makes “technological modernization [transport] society to the brink of

¹² This French phrase means “What a joke!” or namely “You are kidding!”

self-destruction” (Mythen 19). The scientific knowledge of nuclear weapons paves the way for a kind of “nuclear modernity,” a sort of hegemony of a nuclear power. This modernization of nuclear rationality forecasts a self-destruction that “undermines state bureaucracy, challenges the dominance of science and redraws the boundaries and battle lines of contemporary politics” (Beck, 2000, 225).

In *Destination Unknown*, a secret organization sponsors scientists coming from various countries work together to make new technology of “Atom bombs, Nuclear fission, ZE fission, and all the rest of it” (3). The ultimate goal of this multi-national secret organization mastermind is to threaten every state bureaucracy with a view to ruling the world with “a new World Order” (174) by a fatal technology of nuclear weapons. The heroine Hilary Craven, who surreptitiously explores into the mystery of the organization, observes that the world will be “a world of science” (115) and predicts that “scientists must be masters [who] must control and rule [(the world)]” (124). She actually notices the rising modernizing force of nuclear-science rationality may produce a future new order in the world by destroying every national bureaucracy and by redrawing spatial boundaries and battle lines of every nation-state.

Besides nuclear technology, other technologies, like biochemical technologies, in Christie’s espionage novels also render each state bureaucracy all over the world to be “fast passing into a state of anarchy” (167). In *Passenger to Frankfort*, Professor Eckstein, working for British government and considered by many to be Britain’s top scientist, tells Mr. Lazenby about a terrifying fact that advanced science of chemical and biological technology may bring about a national disaster to British people, stating:

“Got a lot of every nasty chemical warfare fixed up. If we ever wanted it. Germ warfare, you know, biological stuff, gas laid on through normal gas outlets, air pollution and poisoning of water supplies. Yes, if you wanted it, I suppose we could kill half the population of England given about three days to do it in.” (168)

This professor’s words implicitly suggest that the social reality of a nation-state, the Great Britain in a postwar age, is on the verge of being totally destroyed by an advanced fatal technology. Professor Shoreham, another scientist working for British government, is “afraid of what science had done in its time of triumph” (254), because “[h]e has lived in the period of nuclear fission [(with)] new weapons that have slain [(and)] the pollutions that new industrial discoveries have brought about” (255). The new industrial discoveries actually lead the development of scientific knowledge into

a new era and finally produce various “risks” in a border-free and trans-national society.

In *Passenger to Frankfurt*, another secret team of world-wide scientists, supported by a mysterious multimillionaire banker, even attempt to develop a new “genotechnology,” in which scientists are able to control a person’s emotion and behaviors by “[putting] something into his scientific brain” (230). They intend to thoroughly control human race from the time when they are “unborn babies” through “germ warfare and experiments with biology” (Ibid.). Lindsay Prior, in her discussion of genotechnology, regards “technologies of genetics” as a “risk” that challenges the security of a social reality.¹³ To her, the “genotechnology” endangers the consolidation of human being’s traditional value of morality, ethnicity as well as the legitimating of the national bureaucracy.

The national bureaucracy often incorporates with capitalist’s investment and financial support in order to maintain the political stability and economical prosperity.¹⁴ For this reason, some bankers and entrepreneurs have their influence not only on national politics and economics but also on trans-national ones. They can even overturn other nation states by utilizing their international money crossing the national boundary. In her earlier detective writing like the novel *One, Two, Buckle My Shoe* (1940),¹⁵ Christie has recognized the close tie of a nation state to capitalists’ money. Mr. Barnes, a former member of Home Office in British government, imparts Poirot that “[t]o upset England—really upset it—you’ve got to play hell with its finance” (61). His words indicate the fact that the power of capitalists’ money is strong enough to sustain the pillar of a nation state. This power of capital money can even manipulate its influence to a trans-national sphere with its “capital flux.” A dental patient in Christie’s *One, Two, Buckle My Shoe* harbors a negative comment on the trans-national financial system underpinned by international bankers. He sees “the old corruptive system of finance” as a “cursed net of bankers all over the world like a spider’s web” (77). As mentioned earlier, this international network of capital money in Christie’s novels undermines the spatial practice of national borderline drawn by

¹³ See introduction part of Lindsay Prior et al. “Genotechnology: Three Challenges to Risk Legitimation” in Ed. Ulrich Beck et al. *The Risk Society and Beyond: Critical Issues for Social Theory*. London: Sage Publication, 2000. pp. 105-6.

¹⁴ According to Harvey, the rich capitalists, intending to guard their proper right and to manipulate the capitalistic market, seek to incorporate with the governmental state to “gain private profit at public expense and to monopolize the means of production”. This enhances a homogenizing and political control of a national state. See his *Space of Capital: Toward a Critical Geography*. New York: Routledge, 2001. pp.275-6.

¹⁵ This novel is also published as *An Overdose of Death* and *The Patriotic Murders*. It is featured with Hercule Poirot, Christie’s master detective who investigates a mysterious murder in a dental clinic. The murdered victim is killed because he knows too many national scandals including illegal deeds “committed” by government and a secret spy organization which works for government for collecting international intelligence. Written in 1940, this detective novel, with some characteristics of espionage novel, paves the path for Christie’s later writing of espionage novels.

the national bureaucracy.

Christie seems to be more interested in dealing with this issue of capital money in her espionage novels. In these novels, her international bankers or capitalists become sponsors of underground organizations, especially those of doing research into high-tech but fatal science. In *One, Two, Buckle My Shoe*, it is a head of the greatest banking firms in England, “[a] man of vast wealth [saying] Yes and No to governments” (12), who indirectly controls the national bureaucracy with a view to establishing the new order of the world. In *Destination Unknown*, it is “[o]ne of the richest men—possibly the richest man in the world today” (232) who establishes a mysterious research center, where is outlandish and deep in African continent, and who props many world-wide and well-known scientists working together for the experiments of atom bomb.

Warfare caused by nuclear and biological technology, like fatal atom bomb, toxic gas and poisoning pollution of water supplies, highlights these contingent risks in Christie’s postwar England. These risks may bring hazardous destruction to national politics and economics by means of a trans-national circulation of capital flow and international intercommunication technology, which also change our traditional perception of space and time especially in a society full of various risks under the dominant control of a nation state.

Conclusion

Delineating various “risks” that cause transnational unrest, like nuclear weapon, ecological crisis, gene technology and riots in big cities all over the world, in her postwar espionage novels, Christie has already foreseen a new contingent world order emanating from a risk society at her time. To her, an ideal new world order in a new social reality is beyond the ultimate judgment of good or bad because “a world order that may be right today [may be] wrong tomorrow” (*Destination Unknown* 128). This non-binary and uncertain mode of thinking highlights a “norm of insecurity” (Coker 6) in a risk society. That is the reason why the national bureaucracy and fixed national border are no more secured. The nation states all over the world can collapse into anarchy or into a boundary-free transnational space at any time due to the contingent “invasion” of various “risks.” Christie’s interrogating attitude toward the official record of historical fact and critical awareness of the risk society and of the trans-national circulation of capital money provide the contemporary readers with a rethinking of the causes for forming a risk society as well as those for the rising dominant order of the nation state. This sort of thinking also evinces a new life experience with new perceptions of space and time or a new contingent order in our

contemporary world. Put it another way, this new order is no more confined to the traditional boundary of a national “space” or the ultimate conclusion of a historical “time” determined by a dichotomous rationale.

The new perspective of social reality and world situation presented in Christie’s spy stories also correspond to the current world situation in the twenty-first century. Does the history repeat itself? Does Christie predict the future world situation in the twenty-first century? These questions deserve our further and retrospective thinking. Christie’s transnational perspective of space and non-binary view of history toward her contemporary society indicate that the controlling bond of everyday life in a dominant social and national order is gradually withering when the post-industrial risk society weakens the consolidation and security of a nation state in an age of risk. With this insightful delineation and critical awareness of her society and country in a postwar age, Christie proves herself that she is not just a celebrated pop fiction writer but also a prominent social critic.

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