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## EDITORS' NOTE

**E**editing a journal is often a thankless job. It is difficult for colleagues and acquaintances unaware of the process to understand the exhaustion and anxiety associated with the entire process of creating and posting CFPs, corresponding with contributors, reviewers and advisers, typesetting a volume and going through all kinds of niggling details associated with the process of publication, often with acute shortage of time. The editorial team of *Postcolonial Interventions* has been experiencing these vagaries for the last four years through various trials and tribulations as well as occasional alterations in personnel. But such adversities are amply compensated by a whole host of new associations across the globe which have not only provided some much needed solace at times, but also extensively widened and deepened our understanding of postcolonial studies as a whole. Mention must be made here of Professor Stepehn R. L. Clark, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, University of Liverpool, who voluntarily shared our CFP for the next issue through a British listserv platform which has already reached several

prospective contributors. Similarly significant has been the timely contributions of Semanti Nandi and Sagnik Chakraborty who have offered some much needed support by joining the editorial team and adhering to tough deadlines. I would also like record our gratitude toward Dr. Rafat Ali for his important review and Dr. Sarah Ilott, for her enlightening opening paper, submitted in time despite a very pressing schedule.

Dr. Ilott's opening paper, focusing on British sitcoms and their explorations of the intersecting frameworks of race, neighbourhood and nation, in fact, foregrounds many of the pressing concerns of this particular issue. This is emphasised by Laura Wright's subsequent paper which explores increasing racial tension in America and resistance against it while analysing the blockbuster *Black Panther*. The transatlantic axis which this paper utilises is further consolidated in three subsequent papers that offer insights into the works of Bob Marley, Edouard Glissant, Edward Braithwaite and Jamaica Kincaid, especially in terms of linguistic and textual appropriations, embracing hybridity and plurality on multiple levels. The next paper takes us into Africa itself as Zumboshi Eric offers his analysis of Nol Alembong and Titus Moetsabi's poetry.

The combination of history and violence which this paper foregrounds is continued, though with a different slant, in Ayendy Bonifacio's subsequent paper on

Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*, which analyses the complexities of accommodating queer bodies within the national imaginary. This awareness of the gender and sexuality is also the fulcrum of Alice Kelly's paper on Conrad's *Almayer's Folly* and its cinematic adaptation, specifically in relation to the characterisation of Nina Almayer. And just as Kelly focuses on the 'embodying' of particular character traits, in her analysis of Nina, body also becomes the site of a critical gaze as Mary Guevarra investigates the commodification of Manny Pacquiao's body through both nationalist and colonial discursive frames. The final paper of the issue discusses Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* and highlights the magic-realist modes through which existing political dispensations are challenged and possibilities of alternate futures are sketched.

This futuristic gaze is also evident in Rafat Ali's review of Wael B. Hallaq's seminal text, *Restating Orientalism: A Critique of Modern Knowledge* which not only underlies the genocidal foundation of much of modern knowledge but also discusses viable alternatives of constituting selfhood and subjectivity based on humility and gratitude.

We, at *Postcolonial Interventions*, retain such humility and gratitude and hope to continue our journey towards greater academic excellence in the months and years to come with all your support and encouragement.

*Encounters with the  
Neighbour in 1970s'  
British Multicultural  
Comedy*

Sarah Illott

“If you don’t shut up, I’ll come and move in next door to you!” Such was the frequent response to audience heckles made by Britain’s first well-known black comedian, Charlie Williams (Leigh 2006). Williams’s response appropriated racist rhetoric of the time, in which the black neighbour was frequently mobilised as an object of fear, threatening the imagined homogeneity of formerly white communities. Having frequently been on the receiving end of racist taunts such as “Get back to Africa” as a professional footballer for Doncaster Rovers in the 1940s and ’50s, Williams was able to claim some

of the power of the Teller of the joke through such put-downs, rather than solely occupying the position of the Butt of racist jokes and slurs. However, the fact was that Williams was forced to rely on self-deprecation and the reiteration of racial stereotype gestures to his need to find favour with the predominantly white audiences of the northern working men's clubs that he toured and the mainstream audiences of ITV's prime time hit, *The Comedians* (ITV, 1971-93), on which he was showcased alongside notable racists such as Bernard Manning. Despite lamenting the "very stupid and very immature" tone of Williams's self-mocking jokes, comedian Lenny Henry – who lived with the unfortunate legacy of what was expected of black comedians, particularly in the North – acknowledged that Williams did "what you've got to do if it's a predominantly white audience – you've got to put yourself, and other people, down" (qtd. in Thomas 2015). What Williams's response to heckles exemplifies is a negotiation of a complex set of power relations informed both by the mechanics of the triadic relationship between Teller, Audience and Butt of a joke and by the social context shaping relationships between blacks and whites in a systemically racist society.

It is against this context that I propose to explore the mobilisation of the figure of the black neighbour in 1970s' comedy as a means of commenting upon and critiquing British multicultural discourse of the time through a consideration of popular and mainstream

sitcoms *Love Thy Neighbour* (ITV, 1972—76) and *Rising Damp* (ITV, 1974—78). I argue that whilst these comedies might seem radical for their time in normalising black neighbours, poking jokes at white bigots, and engaging with social taboo head-on, they ultimately serve to confirm the status quo by appeasing mainstream audiences and letting them off the hook for ongoing racism, whilst placing the burden for the happy functioning of a culturally and ethnically diverse nation in the hands of individuals without reference to cultural, political, historical or economic contexts that have combined to disenfranchise, alienate and subordinate black Britons.

It is essential not to decouple the politics of representation from the politics of production; to do so is to downplay the considerable effects of the social and political climate and consumer-driven market in demarcating what can be said, when, how, and by whom. As Sarita Malik states in her influential book *Representing Black Britain*, “Since images don’t simply operate in a social or political vacuum, the context in which they are seen and the timing of their production is just as important as the types of images which are produced” (Malik 2002, 12). The 1970s were a volatile period in terms of race relations in Britain, as both anti-black and anti-racist action came to a head. Following Enoch Powell’s notorious and inflammatory “Rivers of Blood” speech to the Conservative Party in 1968, in which he incited racial hatred and apocalyptically foretold that “In this coun-



try in 15 or 20 years' time the black man will have the whip hand over the white man" (noting without irony that for this reason he would not be happy until he had seen all of his children "settled overseas"), there was a resurgent nationalism premised on the curtailing of immigration and the "repatriation" of Commonwealth immigrants, in which black people were constructed as the threat to national sovereignty, identity and prosperity, in a manner that was to set the terms of debate for decades to come (Powell 1968). Popular nationalist and xenophobic thought was partly legitimated by the Immigration Act of 1971, which made Commonwealth citizens subject to the same restrictions as those from elsewhere, losing their automatic right to remain in the UK. The framing and regularity of public and political debate around immigration and so-called "black crime" (see Hall 1978) fuelled nationalist groups such as the National Front and the British National Party, who in turn whipped up popular anti-black sentiment. At the same time, as a response to the extent of British racism and often drawing on the language and tactics of US Black Power politics, there was increased anti-racist struggle, often led by second generation black Britons. In 1979, one such anti-racist protest in the form of a counter-demonstration against the National Front in Southall ended in riot as police attacked the counter-demonstrators, injuring dozens and killing a teacher named Blair Peach. The decade culminated in Margaret Thatcher's ascendancy to British Prime Ministership on the back of

promises to curb immigration, following speeches that drew on imagery popularised by Powell a decade earlier.

Responses to the racism of the period varied from anti-racist activism to multicultural policies enacted in the public sphere. Though well-meaning in its aspiration to celebrate cultural and ethnic diversity, critics such as Malik have argued that multicultural approaches effectively functioned to paper over extant racism and “served to re-emphasize the purity and homogeneity of ‘White culture’ when not interfaced with exotic ‘multicultures’” (Malik 2002, 16). Whilst the power of the media to shape attitudes regarding race was emphasized as a strategy for celebrating multiculturalism, there was a sense that “radical struggles to tackle active racism had now been co-opted to ‘manage racism’ in inconsequential ways under the official banner of ‘multiculturalism’” (Malik 2002, 16). It is thus the work of postcolonial criticism to look beyond the celebration of multiculture to return what is repressed or swept under the carpet in the service of such celebration. Sara Ahmed additionally indicates the necessity of the future-oriented project of postcolonial criticism in exposing lingering imperialist legacies, highlighting the importance of moments of encounter as structuring relationships:

If we are to think of post-coloniality as that which is yet to come (we need to think the impossibility

of the “post” if we are to make the “post” possible), then we need to pay attention to *how* and *where* colonialism persists after so-called decolonisation. That is, we need to pay attention to the *shifting conditions* in which encounters between others, and between other others, take place. (Ahmed 2000, 13)

As such, this article uses the figure of the neighbour in multicultural comedy as a means of unearthing the ways in which imperial ideologies persist in insidious ways through a set-up ostensibly concerned with tackling bigotry.

The medium through which I explore the representation of black neighbours is the sitcom. Vince Powell and Harry Driver’s *Love Thy Neighbour* was produced by Thames Television for ITV and ran for eight series from 1972—76. Set in the London suburb of Twickenham, it starred Kate Williams and Jack Smethurst as white Joan and Eddie Booth, and Rudolph Walker and Nina Baden-Semper as Bill and Barbie Reynolds, their black next-door neighbours. Eddie’s pronounced bigotry and hypocrisy ensure that trouble is promised from the outset. *Rising Damp*, created by Eric Chappell and produced by Yorkshire TV for ITV, ran for four series from 1974—78. Based on Chappell’s 1973 play, *The Banana Box*, its TV adaptation starred Leonard Rossiter as the miserly, seedy and bigoted Rigsby, live-in landlord of a shabby Victorian townhouse located in an unidentified northern university town. The pilot introduces Rigsby as

a prejudiced character through his interactions with his white student tenant, Alan (Richard Beckinsdale), whose combination of laziness and well-coiffed hair ensures that he fails to match up to Rigsby's ideals of military masculinity. On the recommendation of his love interest and tenant Ruth (Frances de la Tour), Rigsby agrees to let the vacant room to Philip (Don Warrington), whom he believes to be a "better class of tenant," and indeed Philip's RP accent, conservative dress, hard work and financial security are all traits that Rigsby would appear to value. What studio audience laughter signifies, when Philip turns out to be black, is that Rigsby is unlikely to find his new tenant of a "better class" given his ethnicity. Both shows follow the tried and tested medium of the situation comedy, whose familiarity, repeatability and stability of characters and situations mean that it has rarely been the object of serious academic study. As one critic strongly puts it, the sitcom has been viewed as "unworthy certainly of serious intellectual pursuit, unworthy as a source of ideas or of stimulation, unworthy of critical evaluation, unworthy even as a pastime" (Attallah 1984, 223-24). Yet I would suggest that it is the nature of the sitcom formula – "Episode = Familiar Status Quo ? Ritual error made ? Ritual lesson learned ? Familiar Status Quo" (Marc 1989, 190-91) – that is central to its conservative function in resisting the change promised by exposure to difference. The sitcom formula is the means by which bigotry is normalised and black characters confirmed in their exceptionality, as racist world-

views ultimately remain unchanged. Given the stability of the format, I focus primarily on the pilot episodes of each series as representative of the characters and worldviews established therein, as subsequent episodes serve for the most part to repeat with little variation.

The habitual nature of the sitcom, and its prioritisation of domestic settings, also renders it the ideal medium for exploring the construction of the everyday – that which often escapes critical attention and allows for particular practices, attitudes and representations to become naturalised. By critically interrogating the representation of the neighbour in the sitcom I appropriate for a postcolonial agenda what feminist critic Rita Felski terms a “hermeneutics of suspicion vis-à-vis the everyday” that both challenges the illusion of fixity and questions the ways in which particular terms and practices are naturalised. Following Felski (2000, 79), I argue that it is the perceived “authenticity” and “taken-for-grantedness” of the everyday (as constructed through a medium like the sitcom and represented through the mundane figure of the neighbour) that is potentially pernicious from the perspective of postcolonial critique: in the case of representations of black characters in everyday settings (the home, the workplace), it allows for the entrenchment of stereotype rooted in colonial desires and fears. While multicultural discourse has frequently relied on the more exceptional figures of the terrorist, the gangster, or the mugger as a means of indexing mul-

ticulturalism's failures, I want to suggest that the mobilisation of the quotidian figure of the neighbour may even be more insidious in its function to naturalise and thereby foreclose critique. As Felski argues, "the everyday ceases to be everyday when it is subject to critical scrutiny", and as such it is crucial to analyse critically representations of the everyday as a means of exposing what is taken for granted and can then be popularly mobilised to detrimental effect (Felski 2002, 78).

There is a case to made – as notable postcolonial scholars including Ato Quayson, James Proctor and Paul Gilroy have – for centralising depictions of the everyday in postcolonial studies. For Proctor "the everyday tends to form the constitutive outside of postcolonial thinking" that is typically more concerned with the exotic, the exceptional, the pivotal or the heroic: the inclusion of the everyday in postcolonial critique then poses an implicit challenge to the commonplaces and omissions of the field of postcolonial studies (Proctor 2002, 62). For Quayson, it "is clear that a critical analysis of the everyday must be central to any ethical 'postcolonializing practice'" (Quayson 2000, 46). Gilroy describes the possibility of a "liberating ordinariness" of more complex narratives that are "faithful to the everyday dimension of racial difference" thereby rendering race "nothing special, a virtual reality given meaning only by the fact that racism endures" (Gilroy 2004, 131). I follow the thinking of these critics in insisting upon the study of the habitu-

al and mundane figure of the black neighbour as central to a postcolonial reading practice, with the qualification that *representations* of the everyday lives of black folk – as in the sitcoms considered here – can just as easily serve to confirm dominant attitudes and stereotypes through their very representation as natural, authentic, unexceptional. Without wishing to place the burden of representation solely upon BAME writers and producers, it is noteworthy that the sitcoms engaged here are written and directed by white men, and targeted at mainstream [read: majority white] audiences. Indeed, the underlying rationale for these sitcoms is that the black neighbour is a problem to be solved. It is therefore Malik's just assertion regarding such 1970s' shows, that "many of the comedies 'about race', were actually about Blacks signifying *trouble* [...] so that if the White characters did display prejudice, this was deemed funny or understandable given the 'difficulty of the situation' (Malik 2002, 97). What we see, then, is not (or at least, not only) the normalisation of black neighbours that we might expect to follow from their frequent and habitual representation in these sitcoms, but the normalisation of bigotry and the reification of difference as the routine catalyst for conflict. Yet an examination of such comedy is nevertheless fruitful, as comedy allows for the critical defamiliarisation of moments in which the quotidian figure of the neighbour is made strange by finding humour in the incongruous. As critics, this allows us not to transcend the quotidian nature of the represented, but to re-engage with the everyday in a newly politicised manner.

A dominant concern of postcolonial criticism has been to challenge the ways in which imperial ideology has constructed and reified the figure of the Other as paradoxically knowable through their unknowability and oppositional difference to the Self. The figure of the neighbour in multicultural Britain, however, opens up a different set of possibilities and discourses for engaging with racial difference. For Sara Ahmed in *Strange Encounters* (2000, 12), “Others become strangers [...] and ‘other cultures’ become ‘strange cultures’ [...] only through coming *too close to home*, that is, through the proximity of the encounter [...] itself.” The figure of the black neighbour, by coming “too close to home” (quite literally) provides the moment of encounter with alterity, and is made strange through that encounter. The encounter, Ahmed goes on to suggest, is a meeting that “involves surprise and conflict”, shifting the “boundaries of the familiar” (Ahmed 2000, 6-7). It is, as such, a moment of potential transformation in which relationships between us and them, here and there, then and now are redrawn or consolidated.

In terms of British multicultural politics, the figure of the neighbour and the trope of neighbourliness have played crucial functions. Oral history interviews with Caribbean and Irish migrants attest to the proliferation of the infamous “no blacks, no Irish, no dogs” signs well into the 1960s, speaking to attempts to maintain the cultural and ethnic homogeneity of neighbourhoods. In 1964, Peter Griffiths ran an incendiary racist campaign



that successfully exploited anti-immigrant sentiment, winning a Conservative seat in Smethwick against the national trend by trading on the assumed threat of having a black person live next door with the slogan “If you want a nigger for a neighbour, vote Labour” (see Jeffries 2014). Notions of “home” became central to this election as Conservative desires for expediated repatriation processes were contrasted with the implicit threat to white homes presented by immigrants. The neighbourhood as such becomes a microcosm for the nation, which makes sense in the context of Benedict Anderson’s ideas about nations as “imagined political communities,” in which he sensibly points out that ideas of collectivity and common ideals in relation to the national community can only ever be constructed via the imagination, as the national body is simply too big to account for all of the individuals collected there (Anderson 1991, 4). Imagining the neighbourhood as a microcosm for the nation is then powerful, as it allows individuals to extrapolate from lived realities. When the neighbourhood becomes the locus of debates about national belonging and identity, the figure of the black neighbour becomes a shorthand for various debates around multicultural policy.

## **Legitimising the Assumption of Conflict**

Echoing the racism of Griffiths’ 1964 campaign, *Love Thy Neighbour* is premised on the assumption that having a black neighbour inevitably spells trouble for the white residents. This is carefully set up through the various uses

of humour in the opening scene. The framing of the opening scene positions audiences to align themselves with the black couple – Bill and Barbie Reynolds – who are shown exiting the house they have bought with an estate agent. The problem that they might present to their white neighbours is acknowledged through Bill's knowing comment to the estate agent that "perhaps when they [the white neighbours] find out who has bought the house it will be more of a shock, eh?" Barbie's laughter confirms the humour of this comment, and through this sleight of hand the Reynolds are positioned as being "in" on the joke that their presence might pose a problem, their laughter condoning that of the audience. The camera then pulls back and up to show the row of terraced housing that makes up the street as Joan and Eddie Booth's white car pulls into the space just vacated by the Reynolds' estate agent, whose red car is notably at odds with the otherwise monochrome vehicles lining the street. The use of humour involved in the audience's introduction to the Booths is quite different to that framing the Reynolds. Whilst the Reynolds' shared laughter indicates their collusion and includes the audience, Joan's expression throughout her husband's monologue signifies her unspoken disagreement with her husband, her eye rolls framing him as the butt of the joke: audiences are positioned to laugh with Joan at Eddie. The topic of Eddie's opening monologue quickly paints his character as a bigot and hypocrite. His attitude towards immigrants is conveyed through his pejorative reference to an Italian waiter they have encountered on holiday as

a “wop” (without papers), and his own sense of affront that the Italian was offended, saying “they shouldn’t be so touchy if they’re gonna come over here.” The monologue – delivered whilst dressed incongruously in a sombrero – signifies his attitudes to ethnic or national difference: it is to be tolerated as long as familiar hierarchies are maintained through monetary exchange that distinguishes consumer from consumed, served from server. Immediately following this diatribe Joan notes that they have new neighbours and expresses her hopes that they will get along. Eddie demonstrates a considerable lack of self-awareness in describing himself and his wife as “easy going enough,” reminding Joan of his motto: “love thy neighbour” (cue theme tune). The comic timing of this series of incongruous statements immediately inculcates in the audience the idea that the coexistence of the neighbours is bound to lead to trouble, and that this will form the backbone of the show’s tension and humour.

The show attempts to have its cake and eat it by presenting Eddie’s prejudice (of which there is ample portrayed in the pilot episode alone) whilst also making him the butt of the joke through his lack of self-awareness and hypocrisy. Though it goes some way to representing and thereby acknowledging the racism of the period, the show nevertheless falls foul of what Michael Pickering and Sharon Lockyer have termed the “Alf Garnett syndrome, through which what is being satirised becomes the cause of celebration among at least a section of the

audience” (Pickering and Lockyer 2009, 18). The term references the central character of the incredibly popular TV sitcom *Till Death Us Do Part* (BBC 1965—75), in which the comedy was ostensibly at the expense of the central bigoted character, Alf Garnett, his racist views represented as ridiculous. However, as research by critics such as Dennis Howitt and Kwame Owusu-Bempah has shown, “Bigots appreciate the rantings of the bigoted characters as the truth, whereas non-bigots see them as bigotry” (Howitt and Owusu-Bempah 2009, 63). As such, playing bigotry for laughs is not a useful vehicle for change. Furthermore, it is the joke work itself that allows for prejudice to be simultaneously aired and repressed. Following a series of awkward encounters between the central couples during which the women quickly make friends whilst the men insult, deliberately misunderstand and provoke each other, the episode ends when Eddie returns home from work, having found out that Bill has also been placed on his team there. He embarks on a rant about Bill that has all the hallmarks of racist vitriol: they’ve got nothing in common and never will have, he’s always been against him and his kind, they’re the enemy, it’s either them or us, and if he had his way he’d deport the lot. Eddie, the hypocritical socialist, delivers his punchline: “I’m not talking about his colour: he’s a bloody conservative!” The joke, working through what is implied but left unsaid, means that the racist taboo can be tacitly expressed and verbally repressed, confirmed and denied through the laughter that comes as a mo-

ment of release or relief. Establishing a pattern that the series will repeat with regularity, the series justifies the status quo in which neighbourly proximity across cultural or ethnic divides is constructed as the catalyst for conflict. It is therefore left to individuals to overcome a situation of conflict constructed as inevitable. Laughter between characters and echoed by the studio audience functions to appease mainstream audiences, to sympathise with prejudices, and to downplay the effects of racism by making Bill and Barbie complicit in the jokes.

## **Foreshadowing the Neighbourhood Watch Ethos**

In 1982 the National Neighbourhood Watch Association (NNWA) was established to bring the police and community together ostensibly for the purpose of crime prevention and creating “communities that care,” associating a fear of crime with a fear of strangers (see Ahmed 2000, 33). As Sara Ahmed notes, the surveillance and policing advocated by Neighbourhood Watch takes a common-sense approach to the identification of strangers, which can easily slip into racial profiling as black bodies are perceived to be “out of place” in predominantly white neighbourhoods (Ahmed 2000, 29-30). Writing a couple of years after the establishment of the NNWA, Howard Hallman described the success of communities in which people lived with “like people,” the ideal neighbourhood being analogous to the healthy body, with

“wounds healed, illness cured, and wellness maintained” (Hallman in Ahmed 2000, 25). Ahmed draws this analogy to its logical conclusion, summarising that the ideal neighbourhood is thus conceived as “fully integrated, homogeneous, and sealed” – it is one in which outsiders, or foreign bodies, are not admitted (Ahmed 2000, 25). The “neighbour who is also a stranger” – or the neighbour who cannot be recognised as alike – is thereby rendered a fifth columnist, threatening the community from within (Ahmed 2000, 26). Though the NNWA was established after the sitcoms and representations of the black neighbour examined here, I argue that its official establishment only served to legitimise behaviours that were already nascent in the 1970s as regards the treatment of “stranger neighbours.” Through analysis of these comedies it will become apparent that the social anxieties expressed through the comedies were later sanctioned through the establishment of the NNWA and the increased powers of eviction devolved to local authorities in pursuit of the protection of imaginary communities.

I share with Ahmed her concern for the ways in which “contemporary modes of proximity *reopen prior histories of encounter*” (Ahmed 2000, 13). Mary Louise Pratt’s discussion of the “contact zone” is useful in this sense. For Pratt, the contact zone is “the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequal-

ity, and intractable conflict” (Pratt 2002, 6). The contact zone is, to an extent, coterminous with the colonial frontier, but it denies the privilege of the Eurocentric perspective (Pratt 2002, 6). The contact zone is a space in which individuals from different cultures are confronted with the often-alienating experience of having ideas about their cultures discussed and objectified. By discussing the communal or domestic spaces depicted in these television series as contact zones, I do not intend to conflate the power differentials inherent in the very different contexts of colonial frontier and suburban British neighbourhoods. Rather, I wish to highlight the imperialist impulse of what I would term a burgeoning “Neighbourhood Watch Ethos” exemplified in these sitcoms.

The suburban British neighbourhood as such becomes a *re-contact zone* in these sitcoms, as familiar anxieties about colonial subjects are transposed onto the bodies of the black neighbours, the new fears finding a vocabulary for expression in the old. As Ahmed notes with reference to the NNWA, “The discourse of vulnerability allows self-policing to be readable as the protection of others: the risk posed by suspects and strangers is a risk posed to the vulnerable bodies of children, the elderly and women” (Ahmed 2000, 30-31). This is clearly reminiscent of colonial rhetoric in which anxieties about the threat posed by colonised subjects were transposed onto the bodies of white women, in need of protection from savage or lascivious men. Such logic drives the pilot episode

of *Rising Damp* (and many thereafter). That the shared townhouse that provides the sitcom's setting functions as a re-contact zone, always haunted by prior histories of prejudicial encounter drawn from the British colonies, is made particularly evident in the assumptions about Philip's hypermasculine threat as a black man. Always on the lookout for ways to seduce Philip, Ruth comes to his room in a nightdress, the physicality of her performance and tone of voice making her intentions towards him all too clear. Seductively, she pulls the bedclothes back and is startled to find a skeleton (previously hidden by Alan) lurking amidst the sheets. Rigsby is brought running by her screams, hastily misreading the scene and challenging Philip: "Now then Monolulu<sup>1</sup>, what's your little game, eh? Do you think you can start that sort of thing round here? This happens to be a respectable house!" Rigsby is positioned as the butt of the joke due to the dramatic irony that means studio and home audiences are aware of character details and plot points of which he is unaware (namely Ruth's persistently unrequited desire for Philip). However, the nature of the accusation positions audiences to read Philip as familiar, as knowable via stereotype, the reference to one of the most famous black men in Britain at the time (Prince Monolulu) attempting to offer confirmation of audiences' knowledge of the likely behaviours of black men. As such, Rigsby's own awkwardness and prejudice around his new black tenant, Philip, is frequently expressed through a desire to protect the white woman, Ruth, from Philip's imagined sex-



ual predation (when the reverse is in fact true), which to an extent legitimises it as a selfless and honourable act.

The tendency to react to new situations in familiar ways ensures that power dynamics established during the period of British colonialism are maintained. The following dialogue warrants quoting at length:

Rigsby: I suppose being the son of a chief you can have your pick?

Philip: What?

Rigsby: You know, women.

Philip: Oh yes.

Rigsby: Yeah. Is it true, your women are much more, you know?

Philip: Oh yes. Much more.

Rigsby: Yes I've heard that.

Philip: It's a medical fact, they get far more excited.

Rigsby: Ours are always getting headaches. Do yours get headaches?

Philip: No, I don't think so.

Rigsby: Miss Jones gets headaches, terrible ones, she has to wear her blue glasses. Course, you're very hard on your women, aren't you?

Philip: What do you mean?

Rigsby: Well you know, you make them walk for miles in the hot sun with pots on their heads.

Philip: Oh yes.

Rigsby: To keep them in their place.

Rigsby's assumptions about Philip's relations with women, and about black women, are drawn directly from colonial stereotype, and the nature of the taboo joke (about black women being "much more... you know..." for example) means that for the humour to make sense, stereotypes about black hypersexuality must first be tacitly acknowledged. As Sigmund Freud asserts in relation to such jokes, the audience "must be able as a matter of habit to erect in himself [sic] the same inhibition which the first person's joke has overcome, so that, as soon as he hears the joke, the readiness for this inhibition will compulsively or automatically awaken" (Freud 1960, 151). Though Rigsby's bigotry is poked fun at, as signified through Philip's knowing comments that function to mock his views, it nevertheless similarly falls foul of the "Alf Garnett syndrome," whilst providing an internal logic for the bigotry related to the necessity to protect the white woman. The joke work functions to activate any latent prejudice and allow for its sanctioned airing through the unspoken implications of the humorous lines. In the far less subtle humour of *Love Thy Neighbour*, Eddie warns that his wife "could get raped in the night", her reply of "promises, promises" providing a weak attempt at poking fun at Eddie's failure to sexually satisfy her before Eddie (unnecessarily) asserts "not by me, by him". As such the white neighbours' bigotry is somewhat justified through recourse to the old colonial rhetoric that established fears of black hypersexuality.

## The Individualising Function of the Neighbour Comedy

Though there are moments of subversion and critique in the sitcoms considered here in their various challenges to bigotry, I would argue that they have a broadly conservative and assimilative function in placing the happy operation of a multicultural society in the hands of individuals in a way that fails to question the socio-political backdrop against which these interactions take place. Indeed, it is frequently the power, class and economic equality implied by the residents of adjacent terraced houses or bedsits in a shared house that allows for the satirisation of self-aggrandising perceptions of superiority. In another 1970s' sitcom, *The Good Life* (BBC 1975—78), the neighbourly status of social climbing Margo (Penelope Keith) and Jerry Leadbetter (Paul Eddington) and self-sufficient Tom (Richard Briers) and Barbara Good (Felicity Kendal) was what allowed for the comparison and critique of both the Leadbetters' aspirational middle-class snobbery and the Goods' excessively stubborn and self-righteous approach to self-sufficiency. In terms of humour, the apparent equality of the neighbours in sitcoms modelled in this manner allows for what John Clement Ball might call a form of "satirical multidirectionality" that "works against the binary model of norm and deviation and offers one in which oppositions may be set up without either side being endorsed" (Ball 2003, 21). Yet as I have demonstrated,

the implied equality of neighbours in these 1970s' sitcoms functions as a screen for more serious inequalities.

These sitcoms get away with the airing of prejudice by positioning the black characters as having the upper hand. Whilst a focus on the neighbour allows for associations of belonging and ownership absent from xenophobic discourse that situates migrants and their descendants as temporary guests, urged intermittently to "go home" by white British "hosts" whose hospitality has been abused, the assumption of material and social equality between neighbours belies structural inequality and systemic violence that multicultural policy has failed to address<sup>2</sup>. This creates situations in which the airing of prejudice is paralleled in *Love Thy Neighbour*, as if anti-black and anti-white sentiments had the same history and power. White Eddie's frequent use of terms such as "Nig nog" and "Sambo" to describe his black neighbour are internally justified through the inclusion of Bill's construction of Eddie as a "white honky" and a "snowflake". As Malik reports, a Thames Television spokesperson suggested that the reciprocity of the racism in *Love Thy Neighbour* would "take the heat out of the race question", which was a widely used defence (Malik 2002, 98). Yet it begs the question as to whose end it serves to "take the heat out" of said "race question" (or what we might otherwise term ongoing racism). During a period that witnessed serious structural and systemic prejudice and violence against black

Britons, it only serves to comfort those already in a position of privilege to suggest that equality has already been achieved, and that racist slurs have an easy counterpart in anti-white prejudice. Furthermore, the individualising function of such comedy allows individuals off the hook for structural or political reform, provided that they can learn to tolerate those close to them.

Set in the 1970s but produced in 2002, Metin Hüseyin's adaptation of *Anita and Me* uses the benefit of hindsight to comment on the way that exceptional status was granted to individuals whilst racism was otherwise allowed to march on uninterrupted by representing relationships between neighbours in this way. In this film, British Asian Meena is constructed as an honorary insider by her white neighbour Anita and her posse. The exceptional status granted to Meena is highlighted as other characters freely vent their racial prejudice in front of her, calling a dog "Nigger," discussing going "Paki bashing," or advocating "no more African babies" in a bid to keep the church collection focussed on the local area. It is only at the end of the film that Meena confronts Anita with the uncomfortable truth: "I am the Others". Meena here bears the burden common to minority groups of educating her ignorant white neighbours, and by extension audiences, providing a timely reminder that it is not enough to grant exceptional status to a black neighbour if that does not translate to a challenge to lingering prejudice.

The final episodes of the two series confirm that while individual relationships between black and white neighbours may become more companionable, this does not represent a more significant attitude change, let alone any promise of serious social reform. The repeatability and familiarity of the sitcom format that prioritises stability over change ensures that the bigoted white characters introduced in the pilots emerge unscathed, their worldviews unchallenged by what Ahmed might term their “strange encounters.” As *Rising Damp*’s Rigsby explains to Philip his plans to propose to Ruth, the framing of the scene and respective tones of voice signify a greater element of friendship than was present at the outset of the show, but Rigsby’s insistence that “we’re not like your lot – don’t give them a light tap over the head with a war club and drag them over to the bushes” draws on stereotypes by now all-too-familiar. Similarly, the final episode of *Love Thy Neighbour* depicts Eddie and Bill united in a comradely drink at the pub that would have seemed improbable following the pilot. Yet the dialogue treads familiar territory as Eddie warns Bill to “stick to your own colour” when Bill admits to fancying the white barmaid. All that seems to have changed in the intervening years is that remarks such as this are taken in better humour, marking the neighbours’ familiarity and grudging tolerance for each other whilst insisting that power hierarchies and structures defining wider British society and ensuring that black Britons are unequal recipients of wealth, power and status are nevertheless maintained.

In sum, the popular mainstream appeal of the 1970s sitcoms explored here attests to their appeasement of white viewers, an ability to make them feel good about themselves. As Malik has argued in relation to the kind of collusion that comedians like Charlie Williams exemplified, “because the black comedian would actively collude with this racist humour, it would avoid criticisms of racism” (Malik 2002, 98). What is at stake is at such not the racism present within society, but the ability to frame it more palatably on the screen. This exposes oppositions between the ideological work of multiculturalism, which aims to manage diversity, and the activist work of anti-racist struggle, which engages more directly with inequality and racism, rather than trying to paper it over. In these comedies, we might then read loving the non-white neighbour as a socially conservative manoeuvre, a form of self-love that ensures conviviality at home without the necessary radical critique of systemic violence and inequality.

## Notes:

1. “Prince Monolulu” (b. 1881 Peter Carl McKay) was an early twentieth-century horse racing tipster who styled himself as an African Prince and was one of the best-known black men in Britain at the time, having appeared in a handful of films and a couple of times on Groucho Marx’s quiz show *You Bet Your Life* (NBC 1950—61).

2. A notorious recent example of calls to “go home” were reflected on advertising vans deployed during Operation Vaken, designed to increase the uptake of “voluntary departures,” in 2013. See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/operation-vaken-evaluation-report>.



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*“Go Back to Africa”:  
Afrocentrism, the 2016  
NFL Protests, and Ryan  
Coogler’s Black Panther  
(2018)*

Laura Wright

According to Stephen Howe, “for sheer weight, intensity, persistence of negative prejudice, maybe no human group has been so burdened by others’ attitudes as have Africans – invidious though such comparisons are. A mass of European literature over an extended historical period quite seriously posed the question whether Africans were human at all, and sometimes answered it negatively” (Howe 1998, 23). In spite of and, indeed, in response to such negative perceptions, since before the Civil War and after, the intellectual movements of Pan-Africanism, Negritude, and Afrocentrism worked to counter racial stereotypes about Africa, Africans,

and members of the African diaspora. One can trace assertions of African cultural nationalism in the West to pre-Civil War era African American intellectuals – like Martin Delany and David Walker – and later, beyond the west, to such Francophone African and Afro-Caribbean writers as Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor who established the Negritude literary movement of the 1930s, which asserted a rejection of European hegemonic assimilation in favor of a reclamation and elevation of “Africanness,” calling for the embrace of a Pan-African identity for those in Africa as well as the African diaspora. Howe asserts that while W.E.B. Du Bois may be seen, perhaps, “as the effective initiator of a political [Pan-African] *movement* . . . the most important early exponent of the idea was probably Edward Wilmot Blyden, born in St. Thomas . . . in 1832” (Howe 1998, 25).

It is the discourse that generates this particular “idea” of Africa and Africanness – the idea that posits both Africa and Africans as inferior to their European counterparts and the counter narrative that sees a mythical, pre-trans-Atlantic slave trade, wholistic African culture as superior, the “dramatic affirmation of Otherness, as declaration of cultural independence . . . from intellectuals of African descent,” (Howe 1998, 24) that most interests me in terms of the manifestation of that discourse in the contemporary United States. The concept of an imagined homogenizing shared cultural heritage worked to further the 19th Century “back to Africa”

movement, which urged members of the African American diaspora to return to ancestral homelands in Africa (to which, because of their ancestral forced removal during slavery, they had no access), even as that narrative flattened conceptions of African identity to a mythical ideal. Further, the production of mythic fictional Africas – whether negative, as those recently constructed by Donald Trump’s assertion that African nations are “shithole” countries, or positive, as posited in Stan Lee’s graphic novel *Black Panther* in 1966, at the height of the Civil Rights movement and reimaged by Ta-Nehisi Coates in the age of Trump – have worked to revisit and interrogate the way that citizens of the United States both imagine and often uncritically investigate our mediated understanding of Africa as inaccessible, mythical utopian homeland of the past and an enigmatic *and* often negatively connotated “third-world” of the present.

It is this space of tension and opposition in which I found myself as a postcolonial literature professor over the course of the 2017-2018 academic year. In the fall of 2017, I taught a course called “Literature and Resistance” in which my students examined how the mantra of “go back to Africa” has been weaponized against African American NFL players who took a knee during the National Anthem in protest of police brutality against African Americans. And in the spring, I taught a graduate seminar on African literature in which the class discussed the Afrofuturism of Ryan Coogler’s 2018 film

version of *Black Panther*, in which the narrative of “return” to Africa is explicitly deconstructed. In this essay, I want to discuss how the “back to Africa” mandate as manifest in the current political moment – as either an admonishment by racist white people (as against NFL players who protest) or embraced by African Americans as a strategy for reconnection with an ancestral homeland (as in *Black Panther*) – depends upon the acceptance of a bifurcated identity that negates the liminal space of hyphenated “African-American” identity.

Historically, the prospect of return and the workability (and veracity) of a Pan-African identity, despite the utopian socialism underlying both endeavors – have proven problematic, as evidenced by Marcus Garvey’s unsuccessful attempts during the 19th century to have African Americans return to Africa. As Marie Tyler-McGraw notes of African American “return” voyages to Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1820s, “reversing the transatlantic voyage did not restore . . . African Americans to their native land because their native land was the United States” (Tyler-McGraw 1999, 200). Literary endeavors to represent the return to Africa, according to Fritz Gysin, “more often than not foreground the enigmatic quality of that endeavor,” and “the path of the return is frequently fraught with insurmountable obstacles but the ties of African American . . . characters to their African origins are much more ambiguous, precarious, and tenuous than some advocates of Afrocentrism would like us



to believe” (Gysin 1999, 183). The narrative of return, whether real or depicted in works of fiction, is at once an important source of validation and pride in a past from which African Americans were forcibly severed because of the slave trade but also a problematic mandate based on an imagined and inaccessible homogenizing African identity. Further, even as Negritude and Pan-Africanism find their origins within the intellectual production of members of the African diaspora, the back to Africa movement was initially the invention of whites, like the church leaders who founded the American Colonization Society in 1816. Even though the aims of the Society were honorable and its members were opposed to slavery, the Society’s goal of “returning” African Americans to Africa was viewed with suspicion and resisted by many African Americans as a racist project: “free blacks shared [with the American Colonization Society] the assessment that they were suspended between degradation and honor, yet most did not concur with the solution offered” (Gysin 1999, 192) – a “return” to Africa.

These fraught and often-contradictory circumstances – the desire to embrace an imagined mythical African identity and the resistance to white authored narratives of African return – unfortunately continue to shape discussions of race in the United States, particularly in the wake of the 2016 presidential election of Donald Trump, a candidate who during the preceding eight years, challenged President Obama’s legitima-

cy on the basis of “birtherism,” the bogus claim that Obama was born in Africa – in Kenya – and not the United States. The 2016 decision of Colin Kaepernick, formerly of the San Francisco 49ers, to sit and then kneel during the National Anthem as a protest to police brutality resulted in both the support of many of his fellow NFL colleagues who chose to kneel as well, and his not being signed the following year. Kaepernick explained his action as follows: “I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color.” He noted, “to me, this is bigger than football and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way. There are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder” (qtd. in Wyche 2016). Subsequent protests by NFL players in 2017 drew consistent criticism from Trump, who conflated Kaepernick’s and other players’ peaceful protest of police brutality with disrespect for the flag, for the military, and for the country. During an incessant racist Twitter rampage over the course of the 2017 NFL season, Trump, according to P.R. Lockhart, “seized an opportunity to weaponize patriotism,” shifting the focus from racial profiling by the police to “ungrateful” players’ lack of patriotism (Lockhart 2018).

The NFL protests began when Colin Kaepernick, then quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers, took a knee during the U.S. National Anthem during the 2016 season. Kaepernick’s protest was in response to police bru-

tality against African Americans, but that original narrative was co-opted by President Donald Trump who, on Twitter and elsewhere, claimed that Kaepernick and other players who followed his example were disrespecting the flag, the military, and the country. What followed as the subsequent polarization of fans into camps for or against the players' right to protest, Trump's incessant Twitter drum beat of coded racist language – “ungrateful” serving as a contemporary enunciation of “uppity” – and of calls by African American leaders, intellectuals, and politicians to boycott the NFL when team owners began to bow to Trump's pressure to enforce standing during the anthem. I would have boycotted the NFL in 2017 if I hadn't already boycotted it for two other reasons, primarily because I hate football and secondarily because, even as I am aware of the fact that the NFL clearly has a race problem, it also has a long-standing gender problem, as evidenced by the slaps on the wrists that have historically been doled out to players who beat their wives and girlfriends<sup>1</sup>. That said, life generally following the election of Donald Trump generated some strange and unexpected alliances, and in the case of Kaepernick and likeminded players, I found myself siding with the players. Furthermore, this microcosm of specificity illustrated by Kaepernick's establishment of the NFL as flashpoint for racial injustice and protest in the contemporary moment highlights the way that the call to “go back to Africa” has re-entered the U.S. lexicon in ways that subvert the moral imperative,

however flawed, of that movement's original iteration – and how we, as educators and scholars, might utilize the NFL protests as a teachable moment about discourse and disruption in order to uncover how a peaceful protest in response to a history of institutionalized racism that began with the slave trade was displaced by a none-too-subtle white supremacist narrative of what it means to be a patriotic citizen in 21st century America.

To begin, it is clear that the U.S. president has no concept of or respect for Africa or its diverse populations; he cannot be bothered to learn the names of African countries, calling Namibia “Nambia” during a meeting at the U.N. in September 2017: “Nambia’s health system is increasingly self-sufficient,” he noted (qtd. in Taylor 2017). Further, his picture of Africa and Africans is a one-dimensional stereotypical trope based on media images of privation and disease, as was apparent when, in June of 2017, he “reportedly grew enraged . . . over the number of visas awarded to travelers from certain countries, grumbling that 15,000 Haitians who entered the United States in the preceding months ‘all have AIDS’ and that the 40,000 Nigerian visitors would never ‘go back to their huts’ in Africa” (Mark 2017). And in January of 2018, Trump asked lawmakers, “why are we having all these people from shithole countries come here?” (Dawsey 2018), in reference to protections currently offered to immigrants from Haiti, El Salvador, and African countries. Trump asked as well why

the United States cannot bring more immigrants from Norway, a predominantly white country. In addition to Trump's expressed desire for Nigerians to "go back" to their African huts, there have been repeated calls (by white people) for black people in the U.S. to "go back to Africa" since Trump's election. In 2017, St. Petersburg mayoral candidate Paul Congemi told a political opponent that reparations for slavery have been made in the form of the election of Barack Obama. He continued to rail against African American voters by saying, "My advice to you, if you don't like it here in America, planes leave every hour from Tampa airport. Go back to Africa. Go back to Africa. Go back!" (Wootson, Jr. 2017).

I want to make clear that the admonition that one should go "back" to a place to which one has never been erases a legacy of slavery that spanned centuries and constituted the forced removal of millions of African peoples from a "relatively short stretch of the African coast": "more than 85 percent of Africans coming to the New World left from four . . . regions, all adjacent to each other. . . from Rio Assini in West Africa to just south of Benguela in Angola" (Eltin 1999, 25). To suggest that peoples of African descent "go back" situates their arrival in the United States in the present and disregards the lack of agency of enslaved people in their leaving Africa centuries ago. Such a directive implies a multitude of choices – to leave Africa, to stay in the United States, and to "go back" to Africa – where none exist. And such

contemporary instances are increasingly common. After a Trump election rally scheduled in Chicago was called off due to violent clashes in March 2016, African American protestor Jedadiah Brown told the gathered audience, “I was told to go back to Africa” (“Trump Protestor” 2016). In December 2016, just after Trump won the presidential election, Nikita Whitlock, running back for the New York Giants, was the victim of a home invasion during which the perpetrators left racist messages scrawled on the walls of his apartment; among them, “go back to Africa” (Boren and Payne 2016). Trump’s speeches prior to his election often centered on racist statements, and his defense of white supremacist marchers in Charlottesville, Virginia as “fine people” in August 2017 further emboldened acts of overt and often violent racism against minorities; the next month, Mississippi second grade teacher Cammie Rone posted a racist rant on Facebook in which she stated that “if blacks in this country are so offended, no one is forcing them to stay here. Why don’t they pack up and move back to Africa where they will have to work for a living. I am sure our government will pay for it! We pay for everything else”. Despite claiming that her profile was hacked and that she only posts about “cows, recipes and home improvements,” (Miller 2017) Rone was fired for the sentiment.

If these are the negative and racist manifestations of the discourse of African return, then Ryan Coogler’s *Black Panther* (2018) attempts a reclamation of the overtly

racist back to Africa narrative, even as it makes clear that the narrative of return is problematic and deeply unsatisfying. In its depiction of Wakanda, a fictional African country never colonized by western powers, the film jabs at the edges of colonization; Killmonger's (Michael B. Jordan) statement that "the sun will never set on the Wakandan empire," and Shuri's (Leticia Wright) calling Everett (Martin Freeman) "colonizer" are cases in point. And the film makes explicit reference to the trans-Atlantic slave trade and its legacy, when Killmonger asks that T'Challa (Chadwick Boseman) "bury me in the ocean with my ancestors" at the end of the film. Further, the film offers a truly pan-African cast: many of the actors are African American, but others are from Ivory Coast, Giana, Kenya, and Ghana. The Afrofuturist Wakanda, the "tech-forward, eco-conscious, never-before-colonized country," (Ford 2018) is a society that is depicted on film via elements of various African cultures, including Ruth Carter's costuming, which was inspired by the "hand-dyeing, and beading techniques of the Tuareg, Zulu, Maasai, Himba, and Dinka peoples," and

the impeccable Ghanaian-inspired tailoring of Oswald Boateng, as well as Ikiré Jones's florid textiles, which reimagine Nigerian culture through high Renaissance art. South Africa's MaXhosa by Laduma, with its futuristic knitwear based on graphic Xhosa prints, and the peculiar silhouettes and color clashing of Duro Olowu—the Nigerian designer who dressed Michelle Obama—add an avant-garde

edge. Together, the styles channel the dandified elegance of Congolese *sapeurs* and the transgressive spirit of the Afropunk festival to express the characters' wide range of personalities. (Ford 2018)

Further, Wakandan text was inspired by Nsibidi script from southeast Nigeria, and the all-female army of the Dora Milage was inspired by the female fighting forces from 17th century Dahomey, which is currently the Republic of Benin (Chutel and Kazeem 2018). The film's homage to an Afrofuturist vision of pan-African culture and identity is provocative and compelling, even as, with the character of Killmonger, the film complicates and problematizes the pro "back to Africa" narrative.

*Black Panther* opened nationwide in 2018 and outsold more pre-release tickets than any other super hero movie in history, and has been heralded as "revolutionary," "a movie about what it means to be black in both America and Africa—and, more broadly, in the world" (Smith 2018). Wakanda was potentially based, according to Chadwick Boseman, who plays Black Panther on screen, on a fictional version of "the Mutapa empire of 15th-century Zimbabwe" (Ito 2016). According to Nicolas Barber, with *Black Panther*, "Coogler and his team had a more radical vision in mind – more radical, indeed, than that of any previous Hollywood studio blockbuster," and he notes that the film succeeds in its radical intentions: "Ask yourself: when was the last time any feature



film, whether or not it was made by a Hollywood studio, posited that an African country might be the happiest, most prosperous and most scientifically advanced place on Earth?”. Barber recognizes the prevalence of strong female characters and suggests that “Coogler has taken every genre in which black characters are traditionally sidelined, and then, with considerable flair and boldness, he’s combined those genres and put black characters right at their heart. The one genre which he doesn’t quite nail, ironically, is the superhero genre” (Barber 2018). My take is slightly different. Despite the fact that the internet is awash with articles like Barber’s that describe the movie as “radical,” as Jeffrey C. Pasley notes, “the superhero concept has always been liberal, rather than radical at heart,” (Pasley 2003, 265) and that definitely seems to be the case with this movie, even as the film certainly engages with contemporary politics with regard to race, gender, and capitalism. Still, because it is a super hero movie, it necessarily employs so many of what I think are tired tropes of the genre: tortured good guys and clearly bad bad guys, patriarchy (despite the strong female presence in this film), and, in the character of Everette, a white male savior. Even this movie didn’t escape that one. My sense is that the film gets the super hero genre right, but it does so at the expense of being truly radical.

In many ways, *Black Panther* follows nearly plot point for plot point the narrative trajectory of every other super hero movie ever made – starting with Richard Don-

ner's 1978 *Super Man* starring Christopher Reeve: background story, which establishes the place from which our hero originates, a dead father (for whose death the hero is often somehow responsible or for which the hero feels responsible. In the case of Patty Jenkins's *Wonder Woman*, it is a dead mother, but that movie is clearly the exception), the battle with the shadow self, which the hero initially loses but then returns to ultimately win, and the subsequent establishment of the "new way forward" narrative. But the new way is never really new, which is why super hero narratives are never revolutionary and radical; in the case of *Black Panther*, the new way is marked by the re-establishment of the aristocracy, temporarily toppled by the inner-city "thug" Killmonger, Malcolm X's "by any means necessary" to T'Challa's cautious pacifism. Killmonger is the truly radical character, and as the radical character, he has to die – even though he is the one who is *right*, the one who seeks justice for centuries of oppression. As Frantz Fanon notes, as Malcolm X recognized, and as Audre Lorde echoed when she asserted that one cannot dismantle the master's house with the master's tools (Lorde 1983, 94-101), "in its bare reality, decolonization reeks of red-hot cannonballs and bloody knives," and decolonization "can only succeed by resorting to every means, including, of course, violence" (Fanon 2004, 3). For Killmonger, the return to Africa is about fortifying an arsenal for the liberation of members of the African diaspora abroad; it is not about leaving the present for some imagined idea

of an inaccessible past. T'Challa refuses to yield to Killmonger's demands and when, at the end of the film, he asks a wounded Killmonger to join him in his non-violent and non-activist isolationist leadership, Killmonger says he would rather die: "bury me in the ocean with my ancestors who jumped from the ships, because they knew death was better than bondage". The Middle Passage marks the space of the liminal, the space of unhomeliness and negation of the self; that Killmonger wants to be buried at sea constitutes the return narrative as a fiction, one marked by lack of access to ancestral African homelands as well as a desire to escape the oppression and displacement of life in the United States. As always, it seems, the narrative of return is deeply dissatisfying.

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What constitutes a teachable moment with regard to such dissatisfaction and in the wake of so much racist provocation inherent in contemporary calls by whites for African Americans to "go back to Africa"? After Dylan Roof shot and killed nine African American churchgoers in Charleston, South Carolina in 2016, a group of scholars/activists created the Charleston Syllabus (C. Williams, K. Williams and Blain 2016) as a way of compiling primary and secondary readings for educators and the general public in order to provide context and to help guide civil discussion surrounding the event. Following the example of the Charleston Syllabus, the UVA Graduate Coalition put together a Charlottesville Syllabus to pro-

vide resources for teaching and understanding the white supremacist march that took place there in the summer of 2017 (UVA Graduate Coalition 2017). So in an upper level English course called Literature and Resistance that I taught in the fall of 2017, my students constructed an NFL Syllabus<sup>2</sup> in order to analyze and contextualize the discourse generated by and about the NFL protests that began with Colin Kaepernick in 2016. This was a project in which my students examined the discourse generated by Kaepernick's initial act of resistance, and during which each student was assigned a topic related to the event, tasked with researching that topic and finding two primary and two secondary sources about it. Each wrote a brief summation and analysis of that topic. To quote Paul Bové, in the chapter on "Discourse" in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, discourses "produce knowledge about humans and their society," and an analysis of discourse aims to "describe the surface linkages between power, knowledge, institutions, intellectuals, the control of populations, and the modern state" (Bové 1995, 55-56) as these intersect in systems of thought, and as represented in texts. We come to an understanding of specific circumstances, peoples, events, and cultures through the media and through art. The narrative that we construct—and that we challenge—is the result of multiple, often contradictory, ways of reading events.

The final syllabus consists of two sections, "The History," which is made up of the subsections of "The

National Anthem,” “The First Amendment to the Constitution,” “The Invented Tradition of Standing for the National Anthem,” “Colin Kaepernick,” “The History of the NFL,” and “A Previous Controversy: The Redskins.” The second section, “The Discourse,” examines the way that the narrative of the protest was disseminated by such entities as Donald Trump, the mainstream media, comedians and late-night television hosts, and musicians, as well as how social media interpreted, analyzed, and challenged those narratives on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. One of my students (Hurley 2017) discovered that the third verse of the National Anthem included the lyric, “No refuge could save the hireling and slave from the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave,” which ostensibly refers to African American slaves who fought for the British during the Revolutionary War on promises of freedom after the war ended. As a result of this verse, many African Americans recognize “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” written in 1900 by James Weldon to commemorate Lincoln’s birthday, as “the Black National Anthem.” My students also learned that Kaepernick’s activism was informed by deep reflection and scholarship: according to another student, he “attended a summer course on the subject of black representation in popular culture at UC Berkeley. He was given help and support to be informed on these subjects by people like his girlfriend Nessa, who is more open about her feelings on the subject of the Black Lives Matter movement and, through recommen-

dations from her and his professor Ameer Hasan Loggins, read books related to the issues” (K. Smith 2017).

Further, in a subsequent in-class conversation, we discussed the fact that in the summer of 2017, Kaepernick travelled to Ghana; he embraced the rhetoric of “going back to Africa” and travelled to the continent. On July 4, he wrote a post on Instagram:

...in a quest to find my personal independence, I had to find out where my ancestors came from. I set out tracing my African ancestral roots, and it led me to Ghana. Upon finding out this information, I wanted to visit the sites responsible for myself (and many other Black folks in the African Diaspora) for being forced into the hells of the middle passage. I wanted to see a fraction of what they saw before reaching the point of no return. As Kaepernick notes, “I spent time with the/my Ghanaian people, from visiting the local hospital in Keta and the village of Atito, to eating banku in the homes of local friends, and paying my respects to Kwame Nkrumah's Memorial Park. I felt their love, and truly I hope that they felt mine in return” (Gleeson 2017).

When he was a student at Howard University, *Black Panther's* Chadwick Boseman, like Kaepernick, also travelled to Ghana. Further, when he got the role of T'Challa, Boseman asked his father to take a DNA test from AfricanAncestry.com and discovered genetic linkages to

the Yoruba of Nigeria, the Limba and Mende of Sierra Leone, and the Jola from Guinea-Bissau (Eells 2018, 37). And Coogler's codename for the film was Motherland because "we were making a film about what it means to be African. . . . It was a spirit that we all brought to it, regardless of heritage" (qtd. in Eells 2018, 35). The rhetorical construction of going "back" implies, as it always has, a false supposition that African Americans can return to the place of their ancestral origin, or more specifically, to their place of birth. Further, to go "back to Africa" indicates that Africa is a singularity; to "go back to Africa" is to return home to a homogenous culture and landscape, but in the racist contemporary moment of the United States, for Kaepernick, Boseman, Coogler, and others who "go back," the story is also one of strength and healing, a story about a specific African location that can be shared with others. The discourse generated around such positive experiences of "return" work to fill in centuries of lost history for African Americans even as they also offer a corrective to racist and ignorant perceptions of African countries as "shitholes."

After France won the 2018 World Cup in July, while hosting the *Daily Show* Trevor Noah claimed that "Africa won the world cup." French Ambassador Gerard Araud wrote Noah a letter in response, stating that "nothing could be less true" and argues that even though many of the players' parents were born in African countries, the players are citizens of France, who are "proud of

their country,” and he further notes that their various backgrounds are testament to France’s rich diversity. Noah corrects him, refusing the ambassador’s attempt at erasing France’s imperial legacy: “I’m not trying to be an asshole, but I think it’s more a reflection of France’s colonialism”. According to Araud, “there is no hyphenated identity” in France, as is the case in the U.S. Noah addresses the Ambassador’s position by stating that he understands that racists in France do what racists in the United States do: they “use the fact that these players are of African descent to shit on their Frenchness. So they go, ‘you’re not French. You’re from Africa. Go back to where you came from.’” Noah then asks “why can’t they be both” African and French, and claims that what he loves about America is that “people can celebrate their identity in their Americanness,” a position that allows them to experience the “duality of the two worlds” (“Between the Scenes: The Daily Show” 2018).

Perhaps Noah’s assertion is somewhat idealistic, particularly in an historical moment in the United States when increasingly racist rhetoric seems to deny African Americans their Americanness in its insistence that they go back to Africa. In her 2015 book *The Bright Continent: Breaking Rules and Making Change in Modern Africa*, Nigerian American journalist Dayo Olopade writes “it amazes me how little the world thinks of Africa. I mean this in terms of time and reputation,” and her work offers a corrective to outdated negative ste-



reotypes and grand mythologies: “the continent needs to be seen and heard, not imagined and then ritually dismissed” (Olopade 2015, 4-6). In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, “exploring the possibility of leaving the United States made apparent the two opposing yet intertwined strands in African American thought: a radical and complete African separatism, which was yet thoroughly American in its vision” (Gysin 1999, 193). In many ways, Coogler’s film is both a utopian homage to such an imagined society as well as a commentary on the racist legacy that clamors for an impossible return to the Motherland by the displaced African American whose legacy is forced removal from it, and Kaepernick’s decision to “go back” and share his experience in rich detail is a reclamation of an identity denied to him when he was effectively ostracized and unsigned by the NFL. One way that Africa can exist beyond the imaginary is to fully engage with the historical legacy that has generated the present manifestation of the back to Africa narrative in all of its current iterations: Africa as a concept is always a fiction shaped by the outsider’s experiences and cultural baggage, and the narrative of return (depending upon who is telling it) can be a racist mantra, an ambivalent middle passage, or an empowering experience.

## NOTES

1. For more on the NFL's domestic violence issue, see Deborah Epstein, "I'm done Helping the NFL Players Association pay lip Service to Domestic Violence Prevention," Washington Post, June 5, 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/im-done-helping-the-nfl-pay-lip-service-to-domestic-violence-prevention/2018/06/05/1b470bec-6448-11e8-99d2-0d678ec08c2f\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.a82ff9156874](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/im-done-helping-the-nfl-pay-lip-service-to-domestic-violence-prevention/2018/06/05/1b470bec-6448-11e8-99d2-0d678ec08c2f_story.html?utm_term=.a82ff9156874).

2. Literature and Resistance, "The NFL Syllabus," Medium, Dec. 3, 2017, <https://medium.com/@ellesmythy/the-nfl-syllabus-c4eff918bfc3>.

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*The Oral Heritage and  
Lingustic Heteroglossia  
of Post-colonial Writings:  
Bob Marley and the An-  
glophone Carribean as a  
Case Study*

Elena Barreca

**Introduction**

The importance of Mikhail Bakhtin's (1895-1975) theory of language in postcolonial studies is widely accepted: his notion of dialogism paved the way for a discussion on the inherent multilingualism of literary texts (Bandia 2007), whereas his concept of hybrid construction gave birth to "one of the most widely employed and most disputed terms in post-colonial theory" (Ashcroft et. al. 1998, 117).

However, despite the diffusion of Bakhtin's terms in

post-colonial studies, there seems to be no book length research on the application of his methods on post-colonial writings: the kind of research that Bakhtin did on the novel, has not yet been done on postcolonial literatures. In other words, what is lacking is a work of textual analysis which might clarify how post-colonial authors appropriate and organize the multilingual reality at the core of their experience.

Sketching this analysis will be the main aim of this article: for the sake of clarity, before going deeper into textual analysis, I will briefly summarize some core concepts of Bakhtin's philosophy and connect them with post-colonial literary theories, having the Anglophone Caribbean as a case study.

My main reference will be Bakhtin's *Voprosy literatury i estetiki* (Problems of literature and aesthetics) first published in 1975 and translated in 1981 by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holoquist under the now famous title *The Dialogic Imagination*. As far as post-colonial theories are concerned, I will refer mainly to the classic *The Empire Writes Back* (Ashcroft et. al. 1989) a pioneer work in post-colonial studies, which remains a leading reference in its second edition (2002). Even if the authors of *The Empire* do not openly quote Bakhtin's work, their account of post-colonial languages and literatures overlaps with Bakhtin's theories on several points, as we will see.

## **Bakhtin's philosophy on language and its relevance in the post-colonial discourse**

Bakhtin's philosophy on language develops around a core concept: at the heart of existence is a constant struggle between centripetal, organizing forces (fixed systems) and centrifugal and chaotic ones (the plurality of experience). This struggle is always present – whether in culture, in nature, in human consciousness – but the most complete and complex reflection of these forces is to be found in human language. *Heteroglossia*<sup>1</sup> represents the peculiar interaction between these forces, as they operate into language, where a fixed and shared system constantly tries to tame and frame the plurality of live utterances. Heteroglossia is the locus where centrifugal and centripetal forces collide.

The main point here is a perspective on language as an historical, performative and situational act: the focus of linguistic analysis becomes precisely what had been considered marginal, namely the social diversity of speech types; a word uttered in a specific time and place will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions.

The focus of linguistics should be not only those basic and shared grammatical rules, but also those stratified meanings that words acquire in everyday reality. Of course, this social diversity of speech types reflects dif-

ferent world views, ways of thinking, ideologies, ages, backgrounds; therefore, establishing a linguistic hierarchy, a correct and un-correct way of speaking represents a direct form of social control:

We are taking language not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a world view, even as a concrete opinion, insuring a maximum of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life. Thus a unitary language gives expression to forces working toward concrete verbal and ideological unification and centralization, which develop in vital connection with the processes of socio-political and cultural centralization. (Bakhtin 1981, 271).

Bakhtin's subject of study is the European novel: as one knows, a definition of what a novel is has always been quite problematic, and critics have always failed to identify the genre within two thousand years of prose production. For Bakhtin, the main feature of the novel lies in its language or, more precisely, in its heteroglot use of language: the novel, more than a genre is a force, working within a literary system "*to reveal the limits and the artificial constraints of that system in its attempt to unify the inherent plurality of language*" (Holquist 1981, xxxi. Italics mine).

In opposition with the closed and finished structure of other genres – epic, poetry, tragedy – the novel is in con-

stant dialogue with a polyglot and ever-changing present, and this dialogue is expressed in the multilingualism (heteroglossia) of its language.

In elaborating on this main feature of the novel – in its opposition to the epic – Bakhtin underlines the historical cradle where the novel was born. If the roots of the epic are so far in human history that the genre had reached its completeness long time ago, the novel came about in a particular era of European civilization: a time when socially isolated and culturally deaf patriarchal societies (where the epic came from) gave space to international and *interlingual* contacts and relationships (Bakhtin 1981, 12). It will be a fascinating and challenging task to compare the historical situation that gave birth to the novel with the present rise of post-colonial literatures.

Starting from this general theory on language and literature, Bakhtin goes on to research which are the *compositional forms* used by the novel for appropriating and *organizing* heteroglossia. It is here that he employs the notion of *hybrid construction*, which he defines as “an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two ‘languages’, two semantic and axiological belief systems” (304). This is exactly what happens in post-colonial regions, where people load the European language they are forced to speak with their

own “speech manners” and “belief systems”.

The Caribbean gives us a significant example of the particular linguistic situation of post-colonial regions as “in the Caribbean the European imperial enterprise ensured that the worst features of colonialism throughout the globe would all combine in one region.” (Ashcroft et. al. 1998, 145).

Native languages were utterly destroyed with the genocide of the Arawak and Caribs and during the importation of slaves from Africa, there was a deliberate effort by the slave masters to separate people speaking the same language and to stop any attempt to perpetuate native customs. The result is a people in an alien land, speaking an alien language, which is itself alien to the place, and therefore inadequate to describe both their identity and experience. Because of this crazy and shocking situation, people in the Caribbean have always been very much conscious of language oppression and of its power in the dynamics social control.

## **Linguistic consciousness in the Caribbean**

Together with slaves, in the Caribbean arrived a new language structure; the imported African languages were many but they all had a common semantic and stylistic form. As we have mentioned, an intentional effort was made by slaves masters to divide and extirpate such lan-

guages. Nevertheless, the African structure continued to exist and to operate on an underground and submerged level, adapting itself to the new place and the new languages Africans were forced to speak. This African influence created what poet and historian Kamau Brathwaite (1984) has called *Nation language* :

Nation language is the language which is influenced very strongly by the African model, the African aspect of our new world/Caribbean heritage. English it may be in terms of some of its lexical features. But in its contours, its rhythm and timber, its sound explosions, it is not English, even though the words, as you hear them, might be English to a greater or lesser degree. (13)

Of course, we shall not consider nation language as monolithic and homogenous: Caribbean communities are *polydialectic*, that is to say that in the Caribbean a multitude of dialects intervene to form a generally comprehensible linguistic continuum (Ashcroft et. al. 1998, 44).

The term creole continuum is now widely accepted: the theory states that the Creole complex of the region is not simply an aggregation of discrete dialect forms but an overlapping of ways of speaking between which individual speakers move with considerable ease. As we have seen in Bakhtin's theory, the concern with historical and social varieties of language is of great relevance also in post-colonial studies:

The theory of the creole continuum is an outstanding example of post-colonial approach to linguistics, because it reaffirms the notion of language as practice and reintroduces the 'marginal' complexities of speakers practice as the subject of linguistics. (Ashcroft et. al. 1998, 46)

It was this main feature of language that had been neglected by orthodox linguistics and literary studies, and it is precisely the inadequacy of existing theories that gave rise to Bakhtin's work as well as to post-colonial studies as a whole.

The power and relevance of language in the Caribbean emerges not only in academic theories – which are a main reference for post-colonial studies on language and literature – but also in the very consciousness of the people. The language created by the Rastafarian movement represents an outstanding example of language and subversion within a post-colonial context.

Rastafari (the self given name of the movement) is an African diasporic religion, which started in the Caribbean and quickly acquired a world wide dimension: it is because of this international dimension that postcolonial studies included Rastafari among the *Key Concepts* of the discipline (Ashcroft & al. 1998). Born symbolically in 1930 with the coronation of Haile Selassie (Ras



Tafari) as emperor of Ethiopia – the only African state free from colonial rule since Biblical times – the Rastafari movement developed in Jamaica among the downcasts and oppressed as a way to give dignity, identity and perspective to the African population. Research on the movement started in the fifties with the work of the University of West Indies and quickly acquired a worldwide, interdisciplinary dimension (Murrell & al. 1998; Barnett & al. 2014).

One of the first elements of Rastafari to attract the attention of post-colonial studies was language (Ashcroft & al. 1989): in order to rebel to the colonial linguistic oppression of their environment, Rastafarians deliberately restructured Jamaican Creole into an idiom that could represent them, *dread talk*. In a context where a language to oppose the imperial English simply did not exist, the Rastaman embraced his Creole, emphasized its African element and creatively forged new vibrant words to describe his experience. The use of the pronominal “I” is the most characterizing aspect of dread talk and it was mentioned by the authors of *The Empire* as a significant example of “Creole restructuring” (49), quoting one of the first field-work on the subject:

In pure Jamican creole, the first person singular in all its cases is expressed by the pronoun ‘me’: ‘me have me book’. [...] the Rastas, however, would seem to perceive this creole pronoun ‘me’ as expressive of

subservience, as representative of the self-degradation that was expected of the slaves by their masters. It makes persons into objects, no subjects. As a consequence, the pronoun ‘I’ has a special importance to Rastas and is expressly opposed to the servile ‘me’.  
(Owens 1976, 64)

Another important aspect emphasized by dread talk is the coherence between sound and meaning: for instance, the word “oppressor” becomes “down-pressor”, because “op”/ “up” has a positive connotation that does not match with the implication of the word. This restructuring might seem funny to us because its dynamics are alien to western languages – but they are much common in African ones (Pollard 2014). Generally, the concern with the sound of the word and with its power on reality is a main feature of oral cultures (Ong 2002). Therefore, coherently with African religions and oral traditions, songs are considered a true and real action against oppression: as Count Ossie – the leader of a group of drummers and singers called The Mystics Revelation of Rastafari – would say: “We were fighting colonialism and oppression but not with the gun and bayonet, but wordically, culturally” (Pollard 2003, 68). Similarly, Nigerian artist Fela Kuti describes his art as a “weapon against oppression” (Kuti n.d.). These positions underline not only the militancy of the artists, but also their sensitivity towards the spoken word, a sensitivity deeply enrooted in their cultures.

All these elements are to be found in nation language, which of course comes from the oral tradition. As Bathwaite (1984) says, “music is, in fact, the surest threshold to the language which comes out of it” (16): in his study, important examples of nation language are taken from reggae and calypso songs (24-27).

Nation language and dread talk used to be purely oral languages until authors gave them a written form. As an outstanding example, we can mention Louise Bennett, who started to write poetry in Jamaican “vernacular” around the thirties (and for several years her linguistic choice confined her to the back-scene).

In his 1962 poem “A far cry from Africa”, Derek Walcott (1992, 17) – whose main effort with nation language would come only in the late seventies (Brathwaite 1984, 10) – explains the dilemma of the poet in dealing with the overwhelming reality of heteroglossia:

I who have cursed  
The drunken officer of British rule, how choose  
Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?  
Betray them both, or give back what they give?  
How can I face such slaughter and be cool?  
How can I turn from Africa and live?

However, as we have mentioned, post-colonial dialo-

gism (at least in the Caribbean case) is not only between different languages, dialects, cultures: it is also between the oral tradition and the written one:

The present continuity and vigor of orality in post-colonial societies is demonstrated in the example of the West Indies, where the emergence of a vigorous post-colonial culture is as much the result of figures like reggae performer Bob Marley, 'dub' street poet Michael Smith, and the women storytellers and performers of the Sistren Collective, as of writers like Walcott, Harris, Brathwaite or Brodber. (Ashcroft 1998: 166)

In post-colonial theory the word orature started to be used to stress that verbal art is as aesthetically rich and complex as book-bounded literatures. The continuum between extempore oral performances and formal scribal texts becomes paramount in Caribbean literature (Irele and Gikandi 2004, 720).

Therefore, studying linguistic heteroglossia in Caribbean writings does not only mean to identify the different voices, languages, perspectives in action within the same utterance, but also to explore the oral psychodynamics present in the text, as we will see in our examples.

Reggae lyrics constitute a particular form of hybrid construction. Differently from other forms of orature (e.g. the art of African griot) reggae music has developed in

dialogue with a post-colonial environment, as the artistic expression of the Rastafari movement:

Reggae claims a role of transmission – specifically, of an history that was broken by slavery and of a memory both to be conserved and built – and articulates the question of collective identity in relation to the African diaspora. (Daynes 2010, 3).

The international success of reggae is quite a complex and multifaceted phenomenon: it has linguistic consequences, spreading the use of patois English far beyond its linguistic borders; it has religious and cultural consequences, as it was through reggae that Rastafari became an internationally accepted religion attracting the attention of researchers and medias all over the world; and of course it has political consequences, being the music of the *down-pressed* (Barnett 2014). On top of that, reggae is also a literary phenomenon, being a form of post-colonial orature and operating through lyrics which are a particular example of the organization and expression of post-colonial heteroglossia.

Of course Bob Marley has a main part in the whole scenario, being both a *psalmist and prophet* of the Rastafarian movement and an international icon. With him a peculiar post-colonial culture acquired an international dimension: we shall not forget that Marley not only was the first third world artist to rise from extreme poverty

to international recognition, but so far it has been the only figure of the kind (Toybee 2007). The role of Marley as an *Herald of a Post-colonial World* and the social significance of his songs have been widely explored (e.g. Stephens 1999). At the same time, studies and anthologies on Caribbean literature agree on the representative status of Marley's work in the Caribbean literary scene (e.g. Brown & al.1989; Dawes 2003) and his work is taken into consideration in wide-ranging studies on Caribbean literature (Irele & Gikandi 2004). Significantly, in-depth analyses of his songs highlight their strong oral patterning: Daynes (2010) explores how reggae articulates and transmits the identity, memory and redemption of New World Africans, while Prahlad (2001) examines the use of proverbs that characterize the genre. Both authors give extensive consideration to Marley's lyrics: a recent literary analysis of his work focuses on his use and interpretation of Biblical quotations, mainly Psalms and Proverbs (MacNeil 2013).

In the next section a couple of Marley's lyrics will be taken into consideration together with a poem by Kamau Brathwaite and another by Louise Bennett. My aim is to underline the shared identity of the compositions, both in language and contents. The rendering of heteroglossia through hybrid constructions, multiplicity of voices, quotations and oral dynamics will be the main focus of my brief analysis.

## The linguistic heteroglossia and oral heritage of Caribbean writings

In Caribbean writings, traces of nation language and orality can be found in their materiality as well as in the deep structure of the composition. A closer look at Marley's lyrics will reveal their linguistic *heteroglossia* and their strong connection with the psychodynamics of oral cultures. Coherently with the hybrid construction of post-colonial writings, Marley's discourse contains, mixed within it, a blend of standard English, Jamaican Creole, dread talk and Biblical quotations. In the following analysis, together with reflections on language, I will highlight what Walter Ong (2002) identifies as main features of oral narratives.

Old pirates yes they rob I  
sold I to the merchant ships  
minutes after they took I  
from the bottomless pit  
but my hand was made strong  
by the hand of the Almighty  
we forward in this generation  
triumphantly.  
Won't you help to sing these songs of freedom?

("Redemption Song" Marley 1979)

As we have mentioned, the particular use of the pronominal “I” (/ai/) is a main feature of dread talk: Rastafarians constantly affirm the first-person-dignity of a subject who had been objectified by centuries of slavery. The “I” is not only a word but a source of power in the shaping of a stronger identity, now able to address with dignity the memory of slavery: “*I and I build the cabin / I and I plant the corn / didn’t my people before me / slaves for this country?*” (“Crazy Baldhead” Marley 1976). This use of the “I” is so characteristic of Rasta speech that authors like Braithwaite (1992) have used it to identify the narrating voice in some of their poems.

In “Redemption Song” the first person remains a first person no matter what demands English grammar makes and, more importantly, no matter what mortifications the narrating voice has to bear. In this multileveled process of identification “Marley sings about the slave trade as if he had lived it” (Daynes 2010:95): the “I” embodies the identification with the collective experience, both in the present and in the past. As the author says “*I n I n I n I. That is a spiritual form of Unity*” (Marley 1975).

If the first stanza describes the painful memory of slavery, the second one is a declaration of redemption; the use of “rob” in its present declination is an unmarked form of Jamaican Creole, whereas the intransitive use of “forward” as synonymous of “advance” is typical of



dread talk (Pollard 2014, 78).

“Hand of the Almighty” and “bottomless pit” are clear Old Testament quotes (Ex. 13.14; Ps. 40.02): they point to the slave-and-redemption story of Joseph and to that “black biblical hermeneutics” through which Rastafarians identify themselves with the Judeo Christian narrative (Murrell 1998). In particular, what is quoted is Jacob/Israel’s blessing to his son Joseph (Genesis 49.22-24), one of the twelve patriarchs of Israel (*italics mine*):

22 Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough  
by a well; whose branches run over the wall:  
23 The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at  
him, and hated him:  
24 But his bow abode in strength, *and the arms of his  
hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of  
Jacob*; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Is-  
rael:)

These lines had been previously introduced in the back cover of “Rastaman Vibration”, published in 1976: the quotation was to become particularly famous – at least for the Jamaican public – because few months after the publication of the album, Marley did survive a shooting attempt, further embodying his identification with the biblical patriarch (Steffens 2017, ch. 20). Therefore, in this song Marley is taking his personal life-experience in an overlapping identification with several planes (and voices): the personal and the collective, the biblical and

the historical. All these planes are put into dialogue through language – the Creole of the oppressed, the words of the Rastaman, the blessing of the patriarch etc.

Moreover, in his use of biblical quotes and Rasta's words and symbols, Marley is rearranging themes and formulas belonging to his culture and easily identifiable by the Jamaican audience (Barrett 1977) – which is not only aware of Rasta culture, but being a deeply Christian society is also familiar with biblical references (Stewart 2005).

This “formulaic style” is a main feature that reggae music shares with oral narratives, but it is not alien to Jamaican literature, where it becomes evident in the use of proverbs (as we will see).

Another main feature Marley's lyrics share with the oral tradition is their use of the second person, which represents a direct address to the audience: such addresses are sometimes to be answered by the choir, sometimes they involve the very public. Linguistically, it is worth noticing that in “Redemption Song” the closing question is constructed in perfect standard English: what is implicit in this language shift is that the audience the author is addressing is an international one. After having evoked a specific identity, the song opens up to an international dimension and Marley's plea becomes a world-wide call for freedom.

As we have seen, heteroglossia can be found in its materiality as well as in the deeper structures of writing. “Redemption Song” is an outstanding example of both: on the one hand we have the constant shifting of language registers and a merging of the personal and the collective voice; on the other, elements implicit in the song – the collective dimension, memory, word power, formulas and quotations – point to the oral psychodynamics which constitutes the cultural foundation of the composition.

What we want to stress is that the continuity between performance, music and text is something that emerges through textual analysis, on a semantic, stylistic and linguistic level, without even considering these texts in their performative dimension but only on the plane page<sup>2</sup>.

In order to understand the paramount role language and identity have in Caribbean writings – be them songs or poems, written by intellectuals or ghetto artists – we will take into consideration the composition of an outstanding Barbadian poet and historian.

Like my first example, “Limbo” by Kamau Brathwaite (1990, 194-195), is a record of slavery written in the first person: however, if in Marley the movement is from the past towards (forward) the future, “Limbo” is dominated by the present form. But which present? The present of slavery or the present of the limbo song? As we will

see, at the core of the poem is the ambiguous and hybrid combination of meanings that the word “limbo” has acquired: in particular the author is contrasting the “party dance” which the word points to in his contemporary time and place, with the possible origin of that dance.

It is a *drum poem* and an official video has been recorded (Braithwaite n.d.); the video starts with the various definitions of the word “limbo”, definitions that will be put into dialogue by the author.

Limbo

1. an imaginary place for lost, forgotten or unwonted persons or things;
2. an unknown intermediate place between two extremes: in limbo;
3. a prison or confinement [ C14 from medieval Latin ‘in limbo’ on the border (of hell)];
4. a West Indian dance, in which dancers pass, while leaning backwards, under a bar. [C20 origins uncertain, but it is said to have originated after the experience of the cramped conditions between slave ship decks of the Middle-Passage].

And limbo stick is the silence in front of me

*limbo*

*limbo*

*limbo like me*

*limbo*

*limbo like me*

long dark night is the silence in front of me

limbo

limbo like me

stick hit sound

and the ship like it ready

stick hit sound

and the dark still steady

*limbo*

*limbo like me*

long dark deck and the water surrounding me

long dark deck and the silence is over me

*limbo*

*limbo like me*

stick is the whip

and the dark deck is slavery

stick is the whip

and the dark deck is slavery

*limbo*

*limbo like me*

drum stick knock

and the darkness is over me

knees spread wide

and the water is hiding

*limbo*  
*limbo like me*

knees spread wide  
and the dark ground is under me

down  
down  
down  
and the drummer is calling me

*limbo*  
*limbo like me*

sun coming up  
and the drummers are praising me

out of the dark  
and the dumb god are raising me

up  
up  
up  
and the music is saving me

hot  
slow  
step

on the burning ground.

In its structure the poem alternates two main voices, both in the first person: one is the authorial voice, who maintains the language register of the poet; the other is the chorus, which is taken from the popular “limbo song” by Frankie Anderson (n.d.). These two planes are merged in the first line, the only one where the word “limbo” appears in the narrative plane and not in the chorus: this line is a fifth definition of the word, a definition that will be deepened in the poem. The song as a whole reminds us of cumulative songs, songs with a simple verse structure modified by progressive addition; the contrast between the two planes – the joyful tone of the famous song and the tragedy of the experience – becomes more disturbing as we read the poem.

The narrative voice reflects the aesthetical and refined linguistic framework of the author; however, this voice is not alone but it is constantly interrupted by the voice of the limbo song, that is to say, by the voice that associates limbo with a playful situation whereas for the author it is the remainder of a painful memory.

In his concern with philology and definitions, Brathwaite is giving poetic voice to – and almost theorizing on – the hybrid reality of the word, actualizing in poetry what Bakhtin wrote about the novel:

For the novelist working in prose, the object is always entangled in someone else's discourse about it, it is already present with qualifications, an object of dispute that is conceptualized and evaluated variously, inseparable from the heteroglot social appreciation of it." (1981, 330)

In "Limbo" the poet is directly addressing the reality of heteroglossia, and the problematic and existential dimension it has for his people.

My impressions of oral literature are [that it is] multi-dimensional, multi-generic, multi-this, multi-that. It seems to me a much more holistic way of dealing with life and art ... Life is never just a song or a dance or a drama. (interview with Ama Ata Aidoo in Deandrea, 2002: 17).

As it happens with the African oral tradition, reggae songs are never limited to a singular aspect of life; they are for entertainment as much as for praise; for social commentary as much as for memory and education. In the following example we will see how this multiplicity emerges in language, in a text where multiple voices addressing multiple issues and intentions are put into dialogue and merged into a continuum.

Them belly full, but we hungry  
A hungry mob is a angry mob  
A rain a-fall, but the dirt it tough



A pot a-cook, but the food no 'nough

You're gonna dance to Jah music, dance  
We're gonna dance to Jah music, dance

Forget your troubles and dance!  
Forget your sorrows and dance!  
Forget your sickness and dance!  
Forget your weakness and dance!

Cost of livin' get so high  
Rich and poor, they start to cry  
Now the weak must get strong  
They say, "Oh, what a tribulation!"

Them belly full, but we hungry  
A hungry mob is a angry mob  
A fain a-fall, but the dirt it tough  
A pot a-cook, but the food no 'nough

We're gonna chuck to Jah Music-  
chuckin'  
We're chuckin' to Jah music- we're  
chuckin'

Belly full, but them hungry  
A hungry mob is a angry mob  
A rain a-fall, but the dirt it tough  
A pot a-cook, but the food no 'nough  
(“Them Belly Full (But We Hungry)” Marley 1974)

With regard to this song anthropologist Leonard Barret

(1977), a pioneer and leading figure in the study of Rastafari, wrote:

Reggae is a cultic expression that is both entertaining, revolutionary, and filled with Rastafarian symbolism. The symbols are readily understood in Jamaican society, but the real cultic dimension of reggae was unknown until the Rastafarian song-prophet Bob Marley made his debut in New York. (x)

Barrett's point is widely shared and has become a main subject of research (e.g. Daynes 2010): what has been less explored is how all these elements are reflected into the linguistic heteroglossia of the lyrics. "Rain a-fall but dutty tuff. Me belly full but me hungry" is a main Jamaican proverb; similarly, the "boiling pot" serves as a main image in popular wisdom (Llewellyn 1991, 214). In Jamaican literature, these quotations had been used by the popular vernacular poet Louise Bennett (affectionately known as Miss Lou, 1966, 120-121), in a poem which is a main reference for this song.

Sun a shine but tings no bright;  
Doah pot a bwile, bickle no nuff;  
River flood but water scarce, yaw!  
Rain a fall but dutty tuff

Because Marley's lyrics address an international audience, the transcription of Creole words and phrases often follows English spelling conventions: "dutty" as it appears written in Bennet's poem – and pronounced

in Marley's song – is a Jamaican word from Twi Akan (Ghana) language (Cassidy and Le Page 2002), stressing the African element of the song.

Popular wisdom and Bennet's poem are all extra voices that we find merged within the lyric: as we have seen in "Redemption Song", these quotations can be considered an example of that formulaic style belonging to the verbal art of oral traditions (Ong 2002).

The second stanza introduces the cultic dimension with the name *Jah*, a Rasta neologism for *Yahweh*, God (Barrett 1977). Behind a facade of standard English, the third stanza – which is the one Barrett refers to – points to ritual repetitions and trance dance. We shall not forget that reggae was strongly influenced by *kumina*, a religious ritual dance of Congolese provenience (Stewart 2005).

Jumping again into social commentary, the fourth stanza is another quotation from Bennett's poem (121):

De price of bread gawn up so high  
Dat we haffi agree  
Fi cut we yeye pon bred an all  
Tun dumplin refugee

However, Marley here uses a line that can be taken straightly from a newspaper's title – "cost of living get so high" – introducing further variety in the social diver-

sity of his utterance; but the actuality of the line has a biblical set, where the singer is calling upon the strength of the weak<sup>3</sup> whose voice makes its appearance in the form of direct speech – “*They say* ‘Oh what a tribulation!’”.

Using a standard English spelling form, the song combines a multiplicity of voices: the voice of the poor and oppressed, the voice of popular wisdom, the voice of the papers, the voice of the spiritual leader, the voice of the singer.

An entire paper could be written on the word “chuckin” /chackin/ in the sixth stanza, as “chuck to music” is clearly not an English construction. It seems that the word could assume different meanings depending on the background of the listener. As we find it written in the lyrics, the word might be an inappropriate spelling of “chock” /chack/ meaning “to take the lead in singing songs, hymns, etc.; to sing the verse [...] while others come in on refrain” (Cassidy and LePage 2002, 104).

Significantly, in American slang, “chuck” means food (Kipfer and Chapman 2007), and this possible meaning might suggest the spiritual nourishment provided by the music<sup>4</sup>. However, the word can be phonetically linked to another rich expression of black talk, the word “shuck” defined as:

One of the verbal performances practiced by blacks when they interact with the Man, the establishment, or any authority figure. [...] the function of shucking is both expressive and directive. It is designed to work on both the mind and emotions of the authority figure in order to manipulate him in a particular way. Like many other black speech acts, when it is viewed in its entire, shucking must be regarded as a performance. Both words and gesture are used to promote the desired image” (Lynn 1975, 150)

This word seems to be much more appropriate for our context as it has another important meaning:

To improvise chords, especially to a piece of music one does not know; FAKE IT, VAMP (1957+ Cool musicians) [black senses probably from the fact that black slaves sang and shouted gleefully during corn-shucking season, and this behavior, along with lying and teasing, became a part of the protective and evasive behavior normally adopted toward white people in “traditional” race relations; (Kipfer and Chapman 2007, 1141)

This is just a small philological research: the point is that the lack of a fixed spelling rule for the rendering of Creole amplifies the possible meanings of words, taking us directly in the heteroglot and multiform reality of the spoken word. We must remember that we are not only dealing with multilingualism, but also with the written

rendering of a purely oral language. To say it in Bakhtin's terms, in the language of the lyrics we have a dialogic relation between the written and the oral. Such relation goes beyond spelling to affect the very psychodynamics of writing. As Ong notes (2002, 46), oral cultures are homeostatic; their words acquire meaning only in the actuality of the situation: oral cultures don't have dictionaries and are uninterested in definitions.

I would like to conclude quoting the perspective of the artist: as we have seen in Aidoo's quotation, in oral cultures what western people see as different elements of life merge in the continuity of experience. It is also this world view, this feeling, that makes post-colonial authors and artists embracing the linguistic heteroglossia of reality, emancipating their writings from colonial linguistic norms and affirming their own identity:

[How can you] forget your troubles and dance? Because you got to dance to Jah music, the whole thing is what is inna your head you know? But we say dance to Jah music man, get your culture, from you getting your culture than we can move to progress ... But that is what we are gonna do, we say 'dance to Jah music', but it is 'educate yourself culturally towards His Majesty, Rasta', you know what I mean, it is not just dance, dance to Jah music, it can mean, talk Jah talk, run Jah run, do everything Jah way, do it Jah way, which is the righteous way. Dance the righteous dance.

## NOTES

1. Heteroglossia is the English translation of *raznorečie*, which defines multilingualism, the social diversity of speech types (Holoquist 1981).

2. “The very necessary connection to the understanding of nation language is between native musical structures and the native language. That music is, in fact, the surest threshold to the language which comes out of it.” (Brathwaite 1984, 16).

3. The “strength of the weak” is a main theme throughout the Bible, see: Is 35.03, Eze 34.16, 2Co 12.10, 1Co 1.25.

4. Significantly, in the last stanza the leading line of the song is reversed “belly full but them hungry”. In a press conference Marley gave such explanation of the song “Well you know what I mean is not just food alone, is a head thing, is not a food thing, because your belly can full but your head hungry, you understand, and your head can full but your belly hungry, so it don’t break down to

just a food thing, is not only that I-Man deal with”. Bob Marley, Press conference. “Bob Marley UN Peace Medal [1978, ‘The Waldorf-Astoria’] (Filmed in 1978. YouTube video, 50:05. Posted in April 2012). Accessed Sept 30, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQFIU6n-QJoo&t=1849s> .



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# *Edouard Glissant's and Edward Braithwaite's Ap- propriations of Colonial Languages*

Jeremy Patterson

## **Introduction**

Edouard Glissant, from Martinique, and Edward Kamau Braithwaite, from Barbados, were contemporary Caribbean writers who were proficient both in creative writing (Glissant was primarily a novelist, and Braithwaite is chiefly known for his poetry) as well as in philosophical essays, particularly in regard to language. Both followed the common career path of the most successful and renowned Caribbean writers of beginning in the Caribbean but moving on to Europe and the United States for further exposure. Glissant grew up in Martinique and went on to study philosophy in France,

and later worked as a professor in the United States and later as the director of a French government-sponsored cultural center in Paris until his death. Braithwaite was born in Barbados and went on to study in England and is now a professor of literature in the United States. Though they were almost exact contemporaries – Glissant, who died in 2011, was born in 1928 just two years before Braithwaite, who just died in 2016 – Glissant has generally been considered the first of the two to theorize about Caribbean history and language. At least in regard to their key theoretical concepts related to language, Glissant came up with his term *poétiqueforcée* before Braithwaite developed his idea of *nation language* at the end of the 1970s, relating it explicitly to Glissant's theory. Simon Gikandi actually refers to Glissant as Braithwaite's "mentor" (Gikandi 1991, 728) – although, as we will see, Braithwaite mentions Glissant but does not develop a theory that is truly dependent on Glissant. One of Glissant's key works of philosophy is his essay collection *Le Discours antillais* (1981), and though some critics see a fundamental discontinuity in his work in *Le Discours antillais* and later publications in the 1990s and on, at least in regard to language it is not a misrepresentation of his thought to focus on essays from this one book earlier in his career. As for Braithwaite, his essay "History of the Voice" is a foundational postcolonial essay for the Anglophone Caribbean. Considering these two writers together, particularly in regard to language, makes sense because they come from different linguis-



tic contexts within the Caribbean and at the same time theorize language in those contexts in similar ways. As Celia Britton points out, “Braithwaite’s concept of ‘nation-language’ [...] has much in common with Glissant’s attempts to theorize and to forge in practice a new language use that will be both specific and adequate to the social realities of the Caribbean” (Britton 1999, 2).

The relationship between these two writers and their thought is well documented in the critical literature, but comparative study of their theoretical work has been neglected – perhaps because postcolonialism in studies of Caribbean literatures tends to break down according to linguistic categories. In regard to this compartmentalizing of Caribbean literatures, Christopher Winks writes:

Linguistic divisions have contributed to the fragmentation of the Caribbean and Caribbean studies, as is evident in the deployment of the “postcolonial” rubric upon the Anglophone Caribbean, “Francophone Studies” upon the American *Départements d’Outre-Mer* and (bitter historical irony) Haiti, and “Latin American Studies” upon the Hispanophone Caribbean. (Winks n.d. , 246-247)

Without ignoring cultural – and linguistic – differences, comparative literary study can be productive in the Caribbean context, and should be more common. After all, if critics insist too strenuously on differences, then they must answer the question of what micro-level of

cultural differences no longer prevents comparative study (within one geographical and linguistic context, for example). By comparing Glissant and Braithwaite on the issue of language, this article argues for common ground between them and meaningful contribution on the issue of language both in their postcolonial Caribbean context as well as to others and to universal questions of language and identity. It is particularly in regard to their views of history, their postures vis-à-vis the nation, and their appropriations of linguistic categories and impositions that their theories coincide significantly and demonstrate presuppositions common to many Caribbean writers.

## Glissant on Relativizing Language

Glissant's essay "Langue, multilinguisme" is number 61 in his collection titled *Le Discours antillais*. It opens the section of the book called "Langues, langage," and it actually comes from a presentation he gave almost a decade before the essay was published in *Le Discours antillais* in 1981. He gave the presentation at a conference in Quebec in 1972 under the auspices of the AUPELF (*Association des universités partiellement ou entièrement de langue française*) that also published it in the conference proceedings (Glissant 1981, 503). Given the nature of the AUPELF, Glissant faced an initial public that was highly attuned to the situation of the French language in the world, particularly the academic world, and that to

a great extent worked for the promotion of the French language. At least in the geographical context of Quebec, Glissant certainly found himself in a situation that he distinguishes from his Martinican situation in regard to the status of the French language. He points out that it is generally claimed (*revendiquée*) as the natural language of Quebec, whereas in the Caribbean where he is from it was imposed (*imposée*). The different peoples' relationship to the language and the way that people feel about it in the two areas are thus different (Glissant 1981, 321). In this context, and more importantly in the context of a conference of an organization like AUPELF, Glissant was concerned with explaining that sense of linguistic imposition that people, and especially writers such as himself, could feel. The primary purpose of his essay is thus to show the problematic relationship people can have with a colonial language like French – a relationship that is inescapable and must therefore be negotiated creatively. Glissant attempts his negotiation by way of relativizing the French language. He demonstrates how to do this by examining two linguistic distinctions and ultimately trying to collapse both of them.

The first pair of distinctions is written language versus spoken language. As for many post-structuralist<sup>1</sup> theorists, particularly Jacques Derrida, this seemingly technical linguistic preoccupation has significant social and historical import for Glissant. He indicates that he is primarily focused on written language, which comes

straight out of history – “l’histoire (subie) des peuples qui se sont hier affirmés au monde” – and results in new literatures which, in his native Martinique, are nonetheless in something of a crisis (Glissant 1981, 316-317). He says that the lack of new literature since the *négritude* movement is easily explained by the facts that French is an imposed language and that Martinican authors therefore struggle to use it as their own: “Si un peuple n’exprime pas, c’est qu’il n’est pas libre de le faire” (Glissant 1981, 317). If a lack of liberty is the answer to what Glissant perceives to be a lack of literary production in Martinique, then that lack has to be explained. He sees the chief explanation being the complicated multilingualism of his country. He gives what he calls a brief history of multilingualism, discussing the England of the Middle Ages and then modern-day Switzerland and Belgium, and arrives at an important, and unwelcome, conclusion about multilingualism: “Le dernier avatar historique du multilinguisme tient à l’oppression ressentie, vécue par des ressortissants de certains pays multilingues, quant à l’usage et au sort de leur langue traditionnelle” (Glissant 1981, 320). Whatever and however many the languages are in a multilingual context, Glissant sees history as proving, over and over again, that one language always wins, resulting in oppression. He also believes that this oppression extends to a blockage either in the capacity or in the will to create literature, to use the written language. This blockage comes from a failure to relativize “tout idiome trop densément fonctionnel, toute grande

langue de communication” (Glissant 1981, 320). Such a failure to relativize is related to “l’étude contrastée de la langue et du langage,” an idea that leads to the second linguistic distinction that Glissant takes up in his essay.

This second linguistic distinction, *langue* and *langage*, is a creative reworking of classical structuralist terminology. The structuralist or Saussurean definitions of these terms relate to the human capacity to use language and the actual manifestations of that capacity in the form of distinct languages. *Langue*, or language as a concrete system of communication, refers to whatever languages linguists have identified as distinct idioms, whereas *langage* refers to that innate human capacity to communicate through language. Glissant takes up this distinction and reworks it in what he acknowledges is an unusual interpretation – “de manière peut-être induite” (Glissant 1981, 321). *Langue* for him still refers to specific languages (and thus the plural in the title of this section of *Le Discours antillais*, “Langues, langage”), but he redefines *langage* in order to highlight the problematic relationship that people can have with specific languages when these are imposed on them and their capacity for language. Though most humans have the capacity for language, a trait that sets them apart as a species, they cannot always relate freely to the language of their choice. *Langage* for Glissant is “une série structurée et consciente d’attitudes face à (de relations ou de complicités avec, de réactions à l’encontre de) la langue qu’une collectivité pratique,

que cette langue soit maternelle [...], ou menacée, ou partagée, ou optative, ou imposée” (Glissant 1981, 321). This *langage* is different from Ferdinand de Saussure’s in that it is an active cognitive process rather than a passive cognitive capacity. In reality, Glissant is engaging in sociolinguistics, one of many fields in linguistics that sought to build on, expand, problematize, and nuance what the father of modern linguistics first introduced with the basic categories of structural linguistics. Sociolinguistics has been one of many fruitful avenues of research into understanding further how language works. Glissant, by moving beyond the obvious capacity that humans have for linguistic communication, emphasizes the complicated social and psychological relationship that people have with their languages. Some people identify their language as their “mother tongue,” while others regard their language more specifically as endangered, as chosen, or as imposed – and of course Glissant deliberately ends his sentence that defines *langage* with the word *imposée* in order to remind his audience of the Martinican linguistic situation and his view of Martinicans’ attitude towards French. If languages that people speak are anything more than a first or second language, then the issue becomes not the capacity to use language (and learn new languages) but rather why certain languages are used and how speakers relate to that language, all the more so if they feel constrained to use it.

It would seem that this distinction, *langue-langage*, is a clear

one with no room for overlap, just as how in the original structuralist definitions the two terms designate two distinct concepts. Yet Glissant makes a theoretical move that seems contradictory but that creatively collapses the distinction. He speaks of a *langue* actually becoming a person's *langage*: "Pour qu'une langue devienne langage, il importe qu'elle soit ressentie, vécue par la collectivité comme sa langue, non plus celle d'un autre, si fraternal puisse-t-il être" (Glissant 1981, 321). Glissant appears to contradict himself, or at least to change his definition of *langage*, which he defined as the attitudes that one has vis-à-vis a given language. Surely something more than terminological slippage is happening here (and certainly Glissant could explain himself more clearly). He appears to be saying, specifically in regard to the French language in Martinique, that whatever attitudes one has in regard to an imposed language, relating that language to one's other languages in a non-hierarchical way and creatively using that language can result in a full acceptance of it as part of one's *langage*, or a shift from problematic attitudes and relation to the language to positive, productive ones. The problem for Martinicans is that French is not really *their* language, because "l'utilisation du français leur laisse à la gorge un gout de nécessité non accomplie" (Glissant 1981, 321). How does he propose getting beyond this visceral reaction to the use of French? People have to arrive at a liberty to use the language as their own, "la pratiquelibre et consciente des langues par les peuples, c'est-à-dire pour eux la juxtaposition 'essen-

tielle' de la langue et du langage" – and this will happen only by tearing down the hierarchical relationships that went up when French was imposed, by dynamiting "la fixité tyrannique" of one dominant language, and by forcing French to enter into equal relationship with other languages of the world, such as Martinican creole (Glissant 1981, 322).

In relation to this collapsing of the distinction between *langue* and *langage*, Glissant is also able to achieve the collapse of the distinction between written and spoken language. As one of his conclusions, he writes:

L'opposition hiérarchisée entre langage parlé et langue écrite n'a pas ici – pour moi – plus de sens ; car la langue créole qui m'est naturelle vient à tout moment irriguer ma pratique écrite du français, et mon langage provient de cette symbiose, sans doute étrangère aux ruses du panachage, mais voulue et dirigée par moi. (Glissant 1981, 322)

This leveling of the playing field relates back to Glissant's program of relativizing French, here by revalorizing his "natural" creole. This move to put written and spoken language in symbiosis rather than hierarchy also directly contradicts Peter Hallward's misreading of Glissant. In *Absolutely Postcolonial*, Hallward calls Glissant "dismissive" of creole, believing that Glissant is primarily concerned with some national consciousness. According to



Hallward, “The specificity [Glissant] celebrates is never ‘popular’ or ‘lived’ but always filtered through a written, mastered relation to the particular” (Hallward 2001, 71). Glissant is doing just the opposite. He is celebrating both the written and spoken word, both the “popular” or “lived” and the elite or created.

Glissant situates all of his theory in contemporary Martinican society and broader Caribbean history, much of which remains very similar well into the twenty-first century to when he started theorizing several decades ago. It is important to see how “the specificity that he celebrates” is both contemporary but also the product of historical processes. The major non-linguistic theme tied to history that he takes up in “Langue, multilinguisme” is that of the nation. He actually begins the essay with a discussion of nation and nationalism, before specifically addressing historical and linguistic issues. He finds himself in a world that requires peoples, and writers, to identify themselves with a nation in order even to possess an identity:

Il n'est pas de peuple qui au monde moderne ne soit sommé d'exister en nation, à faute de disparaître comme collectivité. L'obligation contemporaine de se connaître et d'assumer la conscience de soi précipite chaque communauté dans une telle « nationalité ». Il ne peut plus se former aujourd'hui de nation « de fait », c'est-à-dire qui développerait en lenteur et harmonie, selon un rythme pratiquement inaperçu,

une existence collective implicite et très progressivement signifiante. Le monde la sommerait aussitôt de se nommer, ou de s'éteindre. (Glissant 1981, 316)

Glissant is describing here what Benedict Anderson would later call *imagined communities* in his book with that term as its title. The nation as an imagined community has become an assumed part of one's identity, for as Glissant points out, a person or a community of persons must identify itself with or as a nation, or else face extinction as a collectivity. Nationalism is woven into the very fiber of modern identity. Rather than comparing nationalism to "self-consciously held political ideologies," Anderson explains it in terms of other "large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which – as well as against which – it came into being." The two large cultural systems he compares it to are religious community and dynastic realm, both of which, he asserts, "were taken-for-granted frames of reference, very much as nationality is today" (Anderson 2006, 12).

The problem with nationalism for a writer like Glissant is not just the imagined aspect of it. The problem is primarily that the nation results in an imposition of the nation's language – and thus his discussion in the bulk of the essay is about written language vs. spoken language and *langue* vs. *langage*. With the advent of nation-states and nationalism as a "taken-for-granted frame of reference" came also language politics. One of the major

forces in developing and promoting nationalism was what Anderson calls print capitalism. Rather than having, as in the dynastic realms before the advent of nation-states, major languages for trade or diplomacy but little imposition or standardization of people's other languages, "Print-capitalism gave a new fixity to language, which in the long run helped to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation" (Anderson 2006, 44). Written language, that is, provided an aura of legitimacy and historical permanence to the newly imagined communities. This point is important because language does not have to be "an instrument of exclusion," as Anderson points out: "Print-language is what invents nationalism, not a particular language per se. The only question-mark standing over languages like Portuguese in Mozambique and English in India is whether the administrative and educational systems, particularly the latter, can generate a politically sufficient diffusion of bilingualism" (Anderson 2006, 134).

Glissant understands this relationship between nation and (imposed) language, particularly in a colonial relationship to nation. Because of this problematic relationship, he is able to theorize to the point of suggesting the necessity to "relativiser la langue française." The problem of the nation also relates to his concepts of *poétique-naturelle* and *poétiqueforcée*, not mentioned in "Langue, multilinguisme" but directly related to what he is saying about recovering one's *langage* by breaking language free

from its national constraints. In essay 44 of *Le Discours antillais*, titled “Poétique naturelle, poétique forcée,” he defines the latter concept – which he obviously considers to be the necessary poetics of a country like Martinique – as “toute tension collective vers une expression qui, se posant, s’oppose du même coup le manque par quoi elle devient impossible, non en tant que tension, toujours présente, mais en tant qu’expression, jamais accomplie” ( Glissant 1981, 236). If at first forced poetics is a poetics that seems impossible because of one’s relationship to the imposed language, it results in a counter-poetics for Glissant, as seen also in his collapse of the distinction between *langue* and *langage*. Nation must be resisted, and the dominant poetics must also be resisted. As Britton explains, “This is the strategy that comes into play when a harmonious practice of the *langue* is impossible: that is, an attempt to build a *langage* on the basis of an antagonistic or subversive relationship to the *langue*, which the subject nevertheless has to use” (Britton 1999, 30). As Glissant explains it in his essay on language and multilingualism, this strategy is challenging but eminently possible.

## Braithwaite on Reclaiming Language

Braithwaite’s essay “History of the Voice” was first a talk he gave at a conference, like Glissant’s “Langue, multilinguisme.” The public, oral nature of the text is evident because Braithwaite, much more than Glissant,

directly addresses his original audience throughout the essay. In his discussion of certain poets, he even mentions playing recordings of poetry readings for his audience, an effect that the reader cannot benefit from. The most obvious substantive difference between Glissant's and Braithwaite's essays is that the former discusses how to negotiate the language politics of French whereas Braithwaite is concerned with English. In regard to the historical situation of the Anglophone Caribbean (Braithwaite is from Barbados), he develops the idea of *nation language*, a concept that he relates directly to Glissant's *poétiqueforcée*. Glissant's essay "Poétiquenaturelle, poétiqueforcée," came out of a talk he gave in 1975 in Milwaukee<sup>2</sup>. An English translation of the presentation appeared in the journal *Alcheringa* in 1976 (before its inclusion in *Le Discours antillais*), and it is to this article that Braithwaite refers in "History of the Voice":

In [Glissant's article], for the first time I feel an effort to describe what nation language really means. For the author of the article it is the language of the enslaved persons. For him, nation language is a strategy: the slave is forced to use a certain kind of language in order to disguise himself, to disguise his personality, and to retain his culture. And he defines that language as "forced poetics" because it is a kind of prison language, if you want to call it that. (Braithwaite 1993, 270)

Glissant did not, of course, actually use the phrase "na-

tion language” in his essay, but Braithwaite is reading his term into Glissant’s forced poetics. The first point of clear contact between the two ideas, and between both men’s projects, is the specific colonial history of the Caribbean. Indeed, apart from a brief introduction, Braithwaite’s essay begins with several pages of history to help the audience understand the linguistic situation of the Caribbean. Braithwaite’s understanding of his historical situation is almost identical to Glissant’s. They both reference colonialism and slavery, and in relation to those historical facts they also point out the lack of a cultural heritage or history for contemporary Caribbean societies. As Braithwaite says, “The Amerindians are a destroyed people, and their languages were practically destroyed” (Braithwaite 1993, 260). Thus whatever languages there are in the Caribbean, they come from the colonizers (Europeans), the imported-colonized (mainly Africans), and the mixing of the languages that those people brought, along with remnants of indigenous Caribbean languages. For Braithwaite, this means that he has to try to find his culture and poetics within different traces of different cultures – thereby resisting the dominant colonial language and culture. He focuses primarily on how African languages, especially Ashanti from Nigeria, have influenced the English of the Caribbean. He is not as exclusively African in his outlook as, for example, the francophone *négritude* writers; he also mentions Hindi and Chinese influences. Nevertheless, his development of *nation language* as a poetics is most dependent

on what he considers to be African sensibilities. Two of the major characteristics that he ascribes to *nation language* are a dependence on oral tradition ( Braithwaite 1993, 271) – primarily African oral tradition as he understands it – and also seeing his poetics as part of a “*total expression*” (Braithwaite 1993, 273), a total cultural expression. “Reading is an isolated, individualistic expression,” he explains. “The oral tradition, on the other hand, makes demands not only on the poet but also on the audience to complete the community: the noise and sounds that the poet makes are responded to by the audience and are returned to him” (Braithwaite 1993, 273).

The second and third points of contact between *nation language* and *poétiqueforcée*, after the deliberate historical grounding of both Glissant’s and Braithwaite’s poetics, are the nation (as imagined community, and what that entails for postcolonial societies) and language, or more specifically, the attempt to use a language for the development of a poetics. In regard to nation, Braithwaite’s use of the term nation language as a theory of language in the Caribbean context might not be the best choice for at least a couple of reasons. First, without knowing what Braithwaite actually means by the term, one could be forgiven for thinking that it sounds like an oppressive, colonial politics of language –the language of the nation, as it were. This is exactly not what Braithwaite means; it is what he is fighting against. The term is supposed to refer to the opposite of the colonial languages

of the Caribbean – Dutch, English, French, and Spanish; it is supposed to refer to the natural development (not the artificial imposition) of those languages, along with other languages, mainly African, in the Caribbean context.

The second problem with the term is Braithwaite's own difficulty in actually explaining it. It morphs as the essay continues. A sampling of "definitions" that Braithwaite provides for the term includes "the kind of English spoken by the people who were brought to the Caribbean" (Braithwaite 1993, 260), "the language that is influenced very strongly by the African model, the African aspect of our New World/Caribbean heritage" (Braithwaite 1993, 265), "the submerged area of that [English] dialect that is much more closely allied to the African aspect of experience in the Caribbean" (Braithwaite 1993, 266), or an even vaguer, more poetic description such as "an English which is like a howl, or a shout, or a machine-gun, or the wind, or a wave" (Braithwaite 1993, 266). He even asserts that "it is also like the blues" and that "sometimes it is English and African at the same time" (Braithwaite 1993, 266). It is not immediately clear how any of this is an improvement on a concept like *poétiqueforcée*, but Braithwaite generally seems to be using *nation language* to designate languages such as English that have been wrested out of colonial hands and influenced by other linguistic forces such as the African languages of the slaves. His vision is somewhat more optimistic



than Glissant's, because he believes that a poetics has already developed around *nation language*, and the bulk of his essay is preoccupied with demonstrating how poets from Barbados to Jamaica to Harlem have creatively written and performed in their English as a *nation language*. From before the midway point of the essay to the end (approximately 30 pages), Braithwaite extensively quotes (and played, for his original listening audience) both well-known poets such as Derek Walcott and lesser-known poets from all over the Anglophone Americas. Thus, in regard to nation, Braithwaite assumes, with much less discussion of nationalism than Glissant, an essentially transnational posture in regard to Caribbean English. In this sense, *nation language* is as radically divorced from the nation (in the case of Barbados, that would be Great Britain) as possible.

In regard to language then, as a distinct point from the nation for Braithwaite (as it is for Glissant), nation language refers to a non-standardization and a productive openness vis-à-vis English (or Dutch, French, or Spanish). In one of his myriad examples of *nation language*, Braithwaite cites his own poetry in *Rights of Passage* as contributing to a literary-historical moment in which "it was demonstrated, for perhaps the first time (at last), that a *nation language* poem could be serious and employ not only semantic but sound elements" (Braithwaite 1993, 289). This reference to sound is just one of many elements of what Braithwaite is trying to define as na-

tion language that transgress the boundaries of the colonial languages and their associated poetics. As already indicated, this breaking out of colonial restraints (both linguistic and literary) could at times manifest itself as “a howl, or a shout, or a machine-gun, or the wind” (Braithwaite 1993, n.p.). By giving that and the other definitions of *nation language* in their full context, towards the beginning of “History of the Voice,” it is possible to see how Braithwaite, in distinguishing *nation language* from dialect, manages his own collapsing of a distinction between language and literature:

I use the term [nation language] in contrast to *dialect*. The word dialect has been bandied about for a long time, and it carries very pejorative overtones. Dialect is thought of as “bad” English. Dialect is “inferior” English. Dialect is the language when you want to make fun of someone. Caricature speaks in dialect. Dialect has a long history coming from the plantation where people’s dignity was distorted through their languages and the descriptions that the dialect gave to them. Nation language, on the other hand, is the submerged area of that dialect that is much more closely allied to the African aspect of experience in the Caribbean. It may be in English, but often it is in an English which is like a howl, or a shout, or a machine-gun, or the wind, or a wave. It is also like the blues. And sometimes it is English and African at the same time. (Braithwaite 1993, 266)

Ultimately, whether it is a matter of how Caribbean people speak English or how Caribbean writers like Braithwaite use their English for creative production, *nation language* boils down to reclaiming English as their own language, in its specific forms and idioms as developed in a specific sociohistorical context – and this process implies “shunning imperial language” (Waters and Fleming 1994, 391).

## Conclusion

Glissant and Braithwaite share a lot in common in their theories of language in their Caribbean contexts. They anchor their thought in history – colonialism, slavery, and language politics. Both write from a profoundly historical perspective. One could not extend to them the accusation that Neil Lazarus levels against more recent postcolonial “theory” (a problematic term). In *The Postcolonial Unconscious*, Lazarus claims that recent work on postcolonial theory has tended to set aside the temporal, historical aspects of postcolonialism. Specifically in regard to Homi Bhabha, he writes that the term has at times lost its importance in regard to a before/after understanding of colonialism and decolonization. The temporal words that Bhabha does use “do not appear to relate in any discernible way to decolonization as an historical event, that is, to decolonization as a ‘cut’ or break in time, such that one could speak of a colonial ‘before’ and a postcolonial ‘after’” (Lazarus 2011, 12). Whatever

the validity of Lazarus' argument in relation to more recent theorists, Glissant and Braithwaite both understand their situations as, above all else, time-bound and thus the results of historical processes and events. This historicization of postcolonial worlds should be essential for understanding issues of identity, including language, for it is out of historical awareness (or lack thereof) that humans form their identities.

In addition to their firm historical grounding, Glissant and Braithwaite also demonstrate the ability, by claiming certain languages for their poetic expression, to take on cultures and bear the weight of civilizations, as Fanon wrote ("assumer une culture, supporter le poids d'une civilisation"). They are not uncritically accepting cultures and civilizations, however, but rather negotiating with specific, and in the case of the Caribbean, oppressive cultural and linguistic influences in order to develop their own distinct voices and relate them to the rest of the world. This negotiation is a matter of relativizing French (or English), as Glissant points out at the end of "Langues, multilinguisme." In relativizing the French language ("relativiser la langue française"), he envisions different possibilities for relating to the language, rather than one hegemonic relation based on cultural and political oppression. A relativized acceptance of French or any other colonial language, particularly in regard to multilingual contexts like his own in Martinique, fits perfectly into what Glissant went on in the last three

decades of his life to flesh out as a poetics of relation and an open, universal, but not totalizing approach to human identity. It is, at least at first, a *poétiqueforcée* but still a poetics, and one that ultimately will enter into Relation with the world and its other languages and poetics. For Braithwaite, this process results in valorizing *nation language*, or language as it has developed and not seeking to establish one language over another. Britton calls Braithwaite's theory "comparatively optimistic" in regard to Glissant's work, which seeks simply to develop "a strategic relationship of resistance and subversion to the dominant language [...] negotiated from the inside" (Britton 1999, 3). In the end, both writers understand the historical hurdles that their languages and literatures face, and both also see creative ways to overcome those hurdles.

Comparing two writers like Glissant and Braithwaite, far from being artificial and more than simply being productive and interesting because of similarities (though not equivalences) between them, ends up respecting their own creative and theoretical projects. Comparative literature can actually contribute to their projects because such analysis resists the same totalizing categories of identity that postcolonial writers tend to resist, such as national identity. Winks expresses this resistance remarkably well: "A focus on the cultural commonalities of Caribbean South, Central, and North America would productively 'destabilize' nation-state-oriented perspec-

tives in favor of bioregional cartographies that would not reproduce imperial schemas” (Winks n.d., 247). This resistance to nation extends to a resistance to language, or imperial schemas of language, as seen in Glissant’s *poétique forcée* and Braithwaite’s *nation language*. Gikandi synthesizes and summarizes these theories well, referring specifically to Glissant but as a means to describe better what Braithwaite says: “If, on one hand, Creole literatures function as acts of refusal, it is a refusal which, on the other hand, is constructed at the point of interface, at the junction where the European language meets the African voice. What happens when these two faces meet is the key to understanding Caribbean poetics” (Gikandi 1991, 728). This key to Caribbean poetics is what Glissant and Braithwaite both theorize and live out in their own literature. By bringing them together, comparative literature respects and builds on their projects.

## Notes

1. The term post-structuralist is used here in a strictly temporal sense – i.e., theorists of language who write after the main period of the development of structuralist linguistics, those theorists who write in the second half

of the 20th century. The term is not strictly (or mainly) temporal, but the philosophical implications of its common non-temporal usage are beyond the scope of this article.

2. This is just a few years after his talk in Quebec regarding “Langue, multilinguisme.”

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## Annie John, *the Postcolonial Palimpsest*, and the *Limits of Adaptation*

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Revisions of canonical English literature are almost en vogue in what has become the postcolonial canon. William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, written in 1611, and Charlotte Brontë's 1847 *Jane Eyre* have been revised time and again in ways that give voice to the colonized subject. Two of the most popular adaptations of these works, Aime Césaire's 1969 *A Tempest* and Jean Rhys's 1966 *Wide Sargasso Sea*, adapt their source texts in a way that exposes colonial ideology by shifting narration to the colonized subject and location to the Caribbean. Jamaica Kincaid's 1985 *Annie John* further responds

to this practice of Caribbean revisionism by signifying not only *The Tempest* and *Jane Eyre*, but also their most prominent postcolonial Caribbean adaptations (Yeoh 1993, 115). Adaptation theorist Linda Hutcheon contends that much of the pleasure of adaptations “comes simply from repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise” (Hutcheon 2006, 4). Repetition with variation certainly occurs in *A Tempest* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*: *A Tempest* retains the characters and names of *The Tempest* while reframing the narrative to be told through Caliban’s eyes, and *Wide Sargasso Sea* similarly shifts perspective to that of the madwoman in the attic while still repeating the disastrous marriage and house fire of *Jane Eyre*.

However, the domain of repetition with variation is much more tenuous in *Annie John*, which intertextually references Césaire, Rhys, and their source texts but through layers of nuance. In his discussion of Kincaid’s works and their intertextuality, Ian Smith notes that critics of theorizing intertextuality and the search for source texts read it as giving in to a suffocating “paternalistic genealogical determinism,” which destabilizes both signifier and signified (Smith 2002, 802). The amorphous referentiality of *Annie John* could cause it to fall into that domain. However, looking at the myriad of ways in which literature signifies other texts can be an exploration of the “radically intertextual” (Hutcheon 2006, 246). Since the texts I group together in my analysis are what I

find to be radical rewritings of their source texts, I hope to avoid the slippage between signifier and signified and instead explore a radical intertextuality that demonstrates the significance of dialectical adaptation studies. These texts are political pieces that draw our attention to what needed saying in their source texts. In *A Tempest*, Césaire explores contemporary race and colonial issues by pointing out these issues in a classic work of British literature. *Wide Sargasso Sea* demonstrates the sexism and fear of the Other implicated in the colonial gaze that *Jane Eyre* leaves unsaid. And in *Annie John*, Kincaid revises the masculinist ideology of *A Tempest* and racism of *Wide Sargasso Sea* but uses their own revisionist rhetorical strategies to do so. Therefore, while critics of adaptation theory still might find my desire to configure *Annie John*'s intertextual realms unpalatable or even unnecessary, I believe that it provides a useful locus to determine the limits of adaptation theory. Rather than falling into a recursive genealogical trap, I hope in this argument to show how adaptation theory can provide us with ways to think about texts that themselves are not adaptations-as-such.

Kincaid has articulated the indelible influence of Césaire and Rhys as well as the British canon (and *Jane Eyre* in particular). Gilbert Yeoh and other theorists explore Kincaid's intertextuality with *Tempest* revisions. Yeoh argues that *Annie John* follows in the revisionist tradition of postcolonial *Tempests*, the most prominent being Césaire's *A Tempest* and George Lamming's earlier *The Pleasures of*

*Exile*. Yeoh recognizes the metatextual rewriting I argue for here: he says that Kincaid revises tropes in *The Tempest* and through a gender-based lens takes on "a revision of the revisionist tradition itself" (Yeoh 1993, 103). That is, Kincaid moves the focus from Caliban to Sycorax and responds to a feminist lack in *The Tempest* and later revisions. Lauren Maxwell and Smith argue for Wordsworthian intertextuality in Kincaid's works, and Paul Giles and others demonstrate how *Jane Eyre* influenced her writings. Maritza Stanchich, Linda Lang-Peralta, Rebecca Ashworth, Cecilia Sandstrom, Barbara Langston, and others draw similarities between *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Annie John* to show their analogous literary approaches. This well-established analytic tradition arguing for Kincaid's intertextuality with these texts as well as the sort of nationalistic postcolonial narrative that questions the constitution of Caribbean identity politics espoused by Cesaire, Rhys, and Kincaid both support my argument to read *Annie John* through the lens of adaptation studies.

Cesaire and Rhys write back to the canon by giving narrative agency to characters deemed sexual and racial other. Cesaire disrupts the colonizer/colonized relationship indicated in *The Tempest* and reframes it more explicitly as a master/slave paradigm. *A Tempest* fleshes out the character of Caliban, who has been read as the subaltern subject in *The Tempest*. This reading finds Prospero an arrogant colonizer in response to Caliban's subalternity. Cesaire harnesses "transformative powers" to invoke a

model of change that does not simply mimic or mirror hegemonic discourse, but instead revises it to include disaffected voices (West-Pavlov 2005, 90). Similarly, *Jane Eyre* grants Bertha little textual space; she appears only as a shadowy, savage specter that wreaks destruction and is feared for her madness as well as her darkness. Her story is told only through Mr. Rochester, who blames her promiscuity and wildness - stereotypes often associated with Creole women by contemporaneous English society - for her madness. *Wide Sargasso Sea* writes back to this text by providing Bertha (called Antoinette in this adaptation) with an entire backstory and making her the protagonist of her own bildungsroman. Rhys transpositions the novel spatially and temporally; from England to Jamaica (and back to England), and forward a few decades so that she can incorporate the island's abolishment of slavery as a locus of shifting attitudes about race. By subverting the paradigms set up in their source texts, Césaire and Rhys encourage critical inquiry into authoritative narratives.

Like Césaire and Rhys, Kincaid moved away from the European-colonized Caribbean island of her birth. She was born on Antigua in 1949 and lived there until 1965, two years before it became self-governing after years of British rule, when she moved to the United States. Kincaid's engagement with the English literature canon has been well-documented by Paul Giles and others, who find that in *Annie John* she intertextually connects with English literature to "valorize the protagonist's insur-

rectionary manner" (Giles 2010, 211). While Kincaid's works all reflect an intertextuality that demonstrates the continued potency of the English canon, *Annie John* and its sister text *Lucy* most explicitly signify other postcolonial adaptations and their source texts. For Kincaid, postcolonialism represents the split subject and the ways in which colonial violence is turned inward (Giles 2010, 213). This split is represented not only in Kincaid's inscription of the colonized subject through her characterization of Annie John, but also through the text itself, which responds to the traditional canon and to subsequent postcolonial critiques: "her narrative method self- consciously abjures a progressive or redemptive spirit and rotates instead on an axis where positions of domination can be inverted but not eradicated" (Giles 2010, 214). Postcolonial literature eroticizes the sadistic power dynamic of colonialism itself and, in doing so, transposes the colonial dynamic into the very act of reading. As reader, we experience the doubling, prejudice, and betrayal inherent in (re)producing the colonized subject; but also the pleasure of recognizing the transposition. Like Césaire and Rhys, Kincaid represents the anger that necessitates the formation of the postcolonial subject (Giles 2010, 214). This reconstitution takes place through the lens of postcolonialism but also through that of intertextual adaptation studies. Identities are formulated pluralistically, stemming from and working against community, imposing imperialistic powers, and different means of language development.

Cesaire frames this double crisis of identity by adding the racial, colonial, and spatial aspects of having Caliban as hailing from Africa but living as a slave on a Caribbean island. Prospero represents, of course, the white colonial/imperial power, and his singularly constituted identity stands in stark contrast to Caliban's multitude of possibilities: kingdom-ruler/someone who loses control over an island that was once his by birthright; free man/slave; black-as-good/black-as-seen by Prospero. Similarly, Rhys examines pluralistic identities as they relate to Creolism and the double oppression of colonization and gender, and Kincaid portrays a specifically female, homosexual, black intersectional Caribbean identity. These portrayals recognize that identity is mobile and is constantly being translated between self and other in terms of power relations that inform, interpellate, and compel them. Identity cannot be constituted simply in terms of space. It also necessitates a look at political and sociological movements. The confluence of politics that informs history simultaneously informs identity and the means through which that identity is represented: in this case, literature.

Perhaps the most obvious connection between these texts is the recursive figure of the island setting. Like mobile settings (ships, vehicles, etc), islands often represent liminal, anarchic space. Anything can happen on an island, its portrayal seems to convey: it is a place of magic, growth, and escape. The allure of the island



setting resides in its translatability. It paradoxically implies both the frenzied interactivity of travel, port stops, and trade, but also the notion of inescapability, staleness, and island fever. Similarly, islands are often aligned with savagery and wildness, but simultaneously with the impetus for control - as signified through colonization, enslavement, and military presence. The significance of island culture is often neglected in postcolonial studies (De Souza 2009, 238). Although postcolonial scholars seek to destabilize the idea of the West/Europe as the default position (whether looking East towards Orientalism or expanding West), they sometimes still forget to include the intricacies of the more liminal spaces of islands. The term postcolonialism itself implies that the genesis of once/colonized spaces as a point of study lies within the power hierarchies of colonization (De Souza 2009, 239). This way of thinking disregards indigenous peoples as valid subjects because it defines them only in terms of their encounterability with hegemonic society. Pascale De Souza identifies *A Tempest* as a text which reclaims the tabula rasa ascribed to island spaces that so often shows up in European narratives. Instead, Césaire "re-inscribes local subjectivity" onto this blank slate to allow for the proliferation of island-based identities (De Souza 2009, 239). In fact, both *A Tempest* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* radically alter the island settings either indicated or explored in their source texts by moving them to the Caribbean and expanding their portrayal through the eyes of the island-born. And following in

this tradition, *Annie John* takes place entirely on the island of Antigua seen through Annie's eyes. This serves to radically rewrite the specter of colonization indicated in their source texts. *The Tempest* and *Jane Eyre* both portray characters whose wildness and in particular their deviant sexuality is founded in being island-born.

*Annie John* revises its source texts and responds to a tradition of Caribbean revisionism through the narration of a queer islander child. Since a very young age Annie John expresses her attraction to and romances with other girls, including the dunce Sonia, the prim and proper Gwen, and the wild Red Girl. The narrator's queerness is "obvious and ordinary": her desire for homoerotic relationships is something that constitutes who she is (Valens 2004, 123). Only her mother reads these relationships as problematic, since she wants her daughter to become a proper marriageable young woman in the heteronormative tradition. Kincaid responds to canonical English texts that construct the islander as racial other as well as their adaptations, which expose the assumptions of colonial ideology, by revising the colonizer/colonized relationship through the lens of queer Caribbean romance. She redefines the colonizer/colonized relationship as one between "the powerful and the powerless" (Jackson 2007, 300). Tommie Lee Jackson reads this as a sadomasochistic impulse that is reflected through Annie John's relationships with other girls as well as the relationship with her mother, which I will address later. Like

the colonizer/colonized relationship, the sadomasochistic relationship is defined by codependency. The sadist is not a sadist without reflection off the masochist, and vice-versa. Kincaid mirrors this painful, codependent dynamic first through Annie John's encounters with Sonia, her intellectual inferior, who she torments. Annie says: "I loved very much - and so used to torment until she cried - a girl named Sonia. She was smaller than I even though she was almost two years older, and she was a dunce - the first real dunce I had ever met" (Kincaid 1985, 7). In this queer relationship, Annie John signifies the Prospero of *The Tempest* and *A Tempest*, who holds his language and supposed intellectual prowess over Caliban. Even though Caliban is older than Prospero biologically and due to his ties to an ancient power through his mother, Prospero still torments him because he is seen as a dunce. *Annie John* directly parallels this dynamic in her torment of the older but smaller and stupider Sonia.

*The Tempest* encourages its audience to root for Prospero and Miranda to escape their island prison and return to England, an oasis of hope. While the island-born Caliban has some of the most eloquent and elegant monologues, often about the beauty of the island, he is still an uncontrollable savage as seen through Prospero's eyes. Prospero justifies Caliban's enslavement because he attempted to rape Miranda. As island-born, Caliban opposes those hailing from European society, with a different set of social norms and a claim to superiority

through a supposed ability to control its innate desires. Instead, Caliban apparently cannot resist the urge to rape Miranda. Not even the drunkards Stephano and Trinculo express sexual aggression towards Miranda, which implies that Caliban's base sexuality is founded through his connection to the wild, untamable island. The island is a blank slate for the colonizer to project their dreams and desires, but for the island-born through the colonizer's eyes it becomes an ecological metaphor for savagery.

In *A Tempest*, Césaire transposes the conflation of islandhood with deviant sexuality to show how it only appears as such through the colonizer's eyes. Caliban's supposed attempted rape of Miranda is portrayed as Prospero's own doing, as he "put those dirty thoughts" into Caliban's head (Césaire 1969, 13). Prospero actually wields deviant desires, not Caliban. Prospero wants Caliban to be savage because he is island-born, and this is the real problematic desire. This turns the narrative of the overly sexualized animalistic island-born back on the person who created that narrative in the first place. It also signifies the insidious pervasiveness of colonial ideology, since Prospero can seemingly put thoughts into Caliban's head. The fault here lies within an external colonial force that invades Caliban's mind, not within the dynamics of the island itself. Further, Caliban's sexuality in *The Tempest* is not simply indicative of savagery; it also indicates anxieties about lineage and control. His desire to "people the isle with Calibans"

represents these anxieties, which would have vastly different meanings on an island than in Europe (Shakespeare 1611, 1.2). If the isle was peopled with Calibans, they would have twofold the claim to the island: one through nature - Caliban's relationship with his mother and her rule over the island before her death, and one through nurture - Miranda's bloodline from Prospero, who rules over the island by means of his magic and intellectual abilities. Caliban's children would have claim to the throne of the island from both Sycorax and Prospero, and so Prospero must prevent Caliban from ever reproducing to prevent colonial loss of the island.

Further, Césaire further subverts the dominant narrative surrounding islander sexuality by including an African god in the notorious masque scene where Prospero blesses Ferdinand and Miranda's impending union. Whereas *The Tempest* only incorporates the spirits Iris, Ceres, and Juno, *A Tempest* adds the surprise of Eshu, who Prospero did not invite to the masque. He conjures the other spirits through his "art," which aligns them with Europe (Césaire 1969, 47). In *The Tempest*, Prospero remembers Caliban's plot to usurp his throne upon the arrival of reapers to the masque, but in *A Tempest* Prospero's precarious position of power is indicated through the appearance of this pagan god. Eshu is a spirit in the Yoruba religion founded in Nigeria. Césaire's intended audience may not have been aware of the specific allusion, but the name invokes pan-African deities in gen-

eral, which adds to Césaire's project of translating the canonical Shakespearean text for a different purpose and audience. He still includes the normative European spirits but building in an African spirit creates a more pluralistic narrative. Miranda views Eshu as a "devil" rather than a god, which shows his relationship to Caliban (Césaire 1969, 47). In *The Tempest*, Prospero often calls Caliban a devil, and his mother Sycorax supposedly slept with the devil to produce Caliban. Therefore, Eshu is not only related to Caliban through his organic location on the island, but also through ties to his mother. Eshu sings a song that names his role as trickster while simultaneously capitalizing on sexual narratives about black men and islanders. Prospero's belief in dangerous black sexuality is extrapolated to bawdy comedy. Eshu sings that he can "whip you with his dick," which destabilizes the oppressive ideology of dangerous sexuality by incorporating stereotypes of well-endowed black men (Césaire 1969, 48). Here, the dick is portrayed as a weapon that can be used to "whip" others (Césaire 1969, 48). Earlier, Prospero claims that beating is the only language that Caliban can understand and Eshu's overtly masculine threat twists the narrative so that the black body is the one in power. Eshu's mischievous threat to whip Prospero demonstrates the shift from the European hegemonic model to more dialogic possibilities. Césaire implies that islanders and the enslaved will fight back against colonial powers using the realm of sexuality which has so often been used against them.

*Annie John* also queers, through a Caribbean context, its precursor texts in a more metatextual way. As a bildungsroman about a queer Caribbean girl, it alters the normative bildungsroman that tells the story of a straight white man coming of age (Valens 2004, 124). Since homosexual desire threatens colonial heteronormativity, its representation in *Annie John* signifies anti-colonialism (Valens 2004, 124). According to Teja Valens, heterosexuality as a regulated norm can be traced to a Victorian moral code with roots in British imperialism (Valens 2004, 124). Instead of simply resisting colonial heteronormativity, though, *Annie John*'s representation of homoerotic desire refocuses the lens to explore what feels correct and also Caribbean about relationships between women (Valens 2004, 124). The Antiguan setting of enslavement and colonization enforces "extreme domination-of colonized by colonizer, of slave by master, of black by white, but also of women by men, of children by adults" (Valens 2004, 124-5). Further, Annie John's partners all embody what Valens calls a "Caribbean erotics of the grotesque" (Valens 2004, 131). Sonia is covered in long, dark hair that, along with her intellectual inferiority, make her seem almost animalistic (or Calibanistic). Gwen's features, which are immensely attractive to Annie John, are markedly Caribbean. And the Red Girl is unclean, boyish, and smelly, which not only makes the stereotype "'cast back in Western faces,'" but... embraced by Caribbean ones, becoming a trope for anticolonial-

ism as well as for autonomy" (Valens 2004, 134). This subverts the perception of Eurocentric beauty espoused by Mr. Rochester in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The girls reenact colonial domination through the lens of play, or repetition with a difference (Valens 2004, 124), which itself takes place through the very act of adaptation. Kincaid not only invokes and revises colonial relationships in her depiction of homoerotic relationships between Caribbean girls; she also invokes and revises the act of Caribbean revision through adaptation itself.

Kincaid writes a queer, anticolonial Caribbean sexuality that refuses the heteronormative colonial ideal and revises the colonizer/colonized relationship. She also signifies specific textual instances through this lens to situate her adaptation as such. After hearing that the Red Girl has moved away, Annie John has a dream in which she re-envision a scene from *The Tempest* (Valens 2004, 140). She says:

The night of the day I heard about it, I dreamed of her. I dreamed that the boat on which she had been traveling suddenly splintered in the middle of the sea, causing all the passengers to drown except for her, whom I rescued in a small boat. I took her to an island, where we lived together forever, I suppose, and fed on wild pigs and sea grapes. At night, we would sit on the sand and watch ships filled with people on a cruise steam by. We sent confusing signals to the ships, causing them to crash on some nearby rocks. How we laughed as their cries of joy turned to cries of sorrow (Kincaid 1985, 70-71).



Kincaid revises the introductory ship-crashing scene of both *The Tempest* and *A Tempest* by placing it in terms of a queer Caribbean relationship. Like *The Tempest*, *A Tempest* opens with the chaos of shipmates entering the titular tempest. In midst of the storm, the boatswain says that even more powerful than the king is “his Majesty the Gale” (Cesaire 1969, 4). In *The Tempest*, Prospero is portrayed as possessing power through his magic and books; control over Miranda, Ariel, and Caliban; and ultimately, political standing. *A Tempest* revises this to show that though Prospero creates the tempest that causes the ship to go into turmoil, power over nature is a tricky and impossible thing. Kincaid revises both of these texts by placing Annie John and the Red Girl in various positions of power: first Annie John is aligned with Prospero since she plays the rescuer, and then both Annie John and the Red Girl parallel Prospero’s ability to cause shipwrecks with storms. However, Annie John argues for a potency that aligns the girls’ powers with nature; together, they control even his Majesty the Gale to terrorize ships. The people on these ships represent an invasive neocolonialism that Annie John and the Red Girl are able to destroy - at least in the context of a dream. Kincaid revises the introductory scenes of *The Tempest* and *A Tempest* but places it in the middle of the book through the rhetorical device of dreaming and portrays it through the lens of homoerotic desire. Annie John subconsciously works out colonial issues found in *The Tempest*, a “marker of colonial power systems,” and revises the masculinist

view of *A Tempest* in a way that argues for the power of queer desire between Caribbean girls (Valens 2004, 140).

*Annie John* also revises notions of islander sexuality in *Tempests* through appropriation of its tropes. Chantal Zabus finds that the codes of *Tempest* adaptations are omnipotent magic, abstract book knowledge, and heterosexual romance. *Annie John* rewrites *The Tempest* “by critical proxy” (Zabus 2002, 128). Annie’s illness is cured through the magic of obeah, she possesses specific colonial book knowledge, and engages in homosexual romance. Further, while Caliban is reworked through the characters of Sonia, the Red Girl, and even Annie John herself, he is also mirrored through Mr. Nigel, the fisherman. Like Caliban, who Trinculo mistakes for a fish, Mr. Nigel is aligned with fish, which “reverse Trinculo’s conjectures but also the colonial premise about the stinking native” (Zabus 2002, 129). Unlike the *Tempest* colonists, however, Annie John finds “stink,” especially of the Red Girl, appealing. She finds a useful non-normative marriage model in Mr. Nigel and Mr. Earl, whose arrangement is “as close to a Caribbean resistive model as can be found” (Valens 2004, 145). Mr. Nigel visits Annie John while she experiences a mysterious debilitating illness. After she compares him to her father, he laughs so loudly that she feels like his laugh sucks the air out of the room, causing her to have a violent, hallucinatory reaction. The Caliban-like Mr. Nigel thus wields some sort of magic while being a representative of non-heterosexual romance, therefore twisting normative *Tempest* codes.

*The Tempest* and *A Tempest* explore the island setting thoroughly, even though they portray it as something that Prospero and Miranda want to escape from, but *Jane Eyre* only references the island as it pertains to Rochester's wealth and insane wife. In *Jane Eyre* the island is a place of prologue, an uncivilized space of liminality that produces the savage Bertha. Mr. Rochester describes Bertha as initially a "tall, dark and majestic" woman who wishes to marry him because he is "of a good race" (Rhys 1966, 323). This immediately sets up a dynamic wherein Mr. Rochester, a signifier of England, is racially and morally good, whereas islander Bertha becomes diametrically opposed as a signifier of the island, racially and morally bad. After his initial description, Mr. Rochester constructs Bertha's deviant sexuality through the lens of racial otherness, which is connected to her island birth; she is "coarse and trite, perverse and imbecile," with a "pigmy intellect" given to her genetically from a lunatic mother (Rhys 1966, 324). Her madness is exacerbated by tropical weather associated with her island upbringing and racial otherness, which is of course contrasted with Mr. Rochester's own respectable intellect as a subject interpellated through white English society. Mr. Rochester conflates Bertha with prostitutes and animals, affirming the European colonialist narrative about dangerous sexuality. Her madness is founded not only through the maternal tie to her mother but also from her "intemperate and unchaste" past in Jamaica (Rhys 1966, 323).

He justifies locking her away in the attic because of her deviant desires which have led to madness. His view of Bertha implies that being an islander is an indelible mark that stays with its subject even after removal from the island; while this affects how he sees Bertha, it also seems to make intertextual commentary on other island-born subjects, including Caliban in *The Tempest*. Under the colonizer's gaze, the island becomes a place of "isolation and insularity" that remains with islanders perpetually, thus continually recreating them as colonized subject (De Souza 2009, 245). In response, Mr. Rochester confines Bertha not only physically but also ideologically in his attempt to constrain what he views as dangerous sexuality.

In *Jane Eyre*, proper sexuality is demonstrated through non-islander Jane. She desires Mr. Rochester but finds this desire intolerable and impossible: "to agitate him thus deeply, by a resistance he so abhorred, was cruel; to yield was out of the question" (Bronte 1847, 322). Mr. Rochester's libidinous desire is nearly uncontrollable and regulated only by the object of said desire: Jane. Yet his desire is acceptable, while the desire attributed to Bertha is seen as the source of her madness. She is freed from this constraint only through death, after she metaphorically castrates Mr. Rochester by maiming him and shuts down the male gaze by blinding him. However, even this tenuous sexual agency is transposed in the end. Mr. Rochester gives birth to a child with Jane, indicating the attempted castration is ineffectual, and

can see the child, which demonstrates a return of the patriarchal, colonial worldview. Their child is born after a long courtship and marriage, which falls within the confines of normative regulated European sexuality.

This paradigm is critically scrutinized in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Before allowing herself to be seduced by the promise of European genteel status, Antoinette has an ongoing loving affair with Sandi Cosway. Although she finds fulfillment and joy in this relationship, as a wealthy white islander, “she won't marry with a coloured man even though he don't look like a coloured man” (Rhys 1966, 73). Sandi's physical appearance does not deter Antoinette, but her perception of his socially constructed identity as interpreted through her lens of colonialist racist ideology does. Even though Mr. Rochester and other European colonists think of Antoinette as a sexually deviant islander, she hypocritically internalizes this view to project it onto someone she sees as less than her: a black islander. Antoinette's and Sandi's relationship serves as a foil to Antoinette's relationship with Mr. Rochester, who constructs her as the racial other even as she perceives herself to be white. Mr. Rochester does not feel love but instead “thirst” for his wife, which again associates her with base desires that can be fulfilled by animals or the environment (Rhys 1966, 55). He conflates her sexuality with the ecological landscape of the Caribbean island she was born on; both are beautiful but also disorderly and therefore danger-

ous. He desires both but simultaneously fears them, and this fear is a catalyst for his arousal but also the reason he cannot love Antoinette. Although Mr. Rochester believes himself to have an egalitarian worldview, his racism is expressed through his rejection of things he associates with the island. Even Antoinette's attempts to please him by correlating herself with European notions of desirable female purity fail because he views her as an islander. She wears a white dress, thus aligning herself with feminine chastity, but the way it slips over one shoulder "associates her with (black) female wantonness and prostitution" (Mardarossian 1999, 1076). Antoinette's sexuality is inextricable from her place of birth, and Jamaica will always inform perceptions of her sexuality. Her internalized colonialist ideology reflects this when she says, "I wish to stay here in the dark... where I belong" (Rhys 1966, 105). Antoinette feels she belongs "in the dark": the dark of her imposed racial identity, of her madness, of her island, and of her attic. Rhys writes back to *Jane Eyre* by problematizing deviant sexuality and its relation to the island in the original text.

Kincaid revises these depictions of islander sexuality alongside her revision of *Tempests*. Annie John envisions a future where she visits Belgium. She pictures the escape while realizing that in this vision, she would fill the position of Bertha/Antoinette; still, even with this knowledge the dream takes place through a queer Caribbean lens. Annie John imagines living in Belgium, where her favorite character Jane Eyre once lived, af-

ter Gwen tells her she should marry Gwen's brother. Her vision for a *Jane Eyre*-based future is based off a push against heteronormativity. Mr. Rochester's colonial view of islander sexuality is reflected through how Annie John's mother views her potential slut of a daughter. As was instilled in her through colonial ideology, Annie John's mother associates wildness and freeness with sexual immorality. She does not want Annie John to spend time with the Red Girl or to talk to boys. To her, both of these indicate the kind of sexual looseness Mr. Rochester sees in Bertha/Antoinette.

Kincaid further signifies islander sexuality in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* through Annie John's mysterious illness. She is saved from her illness by Ma Rain's obeah, which her mother also uses to fend off her father's affair partners, correlating obeah with deviant sexuality. Annie John says:

My mother would go to a woman every Friday who could tell if things were being done to us and if these women were having successes with my father. I'm pretty sure he was faithful, but that's only because he was old. But there were always these consultations, and really it was a sort of psychiatrist, someone keeping the unconscious all oiled up" (Kincaid 1985, 409).

The idea of obeah as a means of sexual control also takes place in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. After Edward (Mr. Rochester) reads the letter sent to him by Daniel Cosway and subsequently rejects Antoinette, she runs to ask the obe-

ah woman Christophine for a love potion to make him adore her once again. This scene directly situates Christophine as oppositional force to Edward's representation of patriarchal authoritarian law. Christophine advises Antoinette is to leave Edward, to "have spunks and do battle for yourself" (Rhys 1966, 69). However, Antoinette begs for help and Christophine eventually tells her how to use obeah to have Edward fall for her. Antoinette seduces Edward using Christophine's potion, rum, and candles, but Edward becomes sick and imagines she has poisoned him. The poisoning and its aftermath is the turning point of the text. Edward accuses Christophine of trying to poison him, which leads to a confrontation about her obeah powers. Readers knowledgeable about *Jane Eyre* recognize a final subversive act of obeah: Christophine subtly curses Edward to lose his eyes, which happens after Antoinette/Bertha sets fire to his estate.

*Annie John* mirrors this relationship between islander sexuality and obeah through Ma Chess, who to Annie John represents escape from the sadomasochistic relationship with her mother (Jackson 2007, 309). Therefore, she also represents an escape from the colonizer/colonized relationship and a new form of sexual self-understanding. Annie John becomes ill after a falling-out with her mother, during which her mother calls her a slut, but is saved from this sexual demonization through Ma Chess's obeah. While sick, Annie John is sequestered in her room, which is reminiscent of the punishment red room in *Jane*



*Eyre* (which is also reflected through the Red Girl's moniker). It also signifies the attic of Bertha/Antoinette's confinement. Mr. Rochester confines her largely because he sees her as a sexual deviant, and this is paralleled by Annie John's mother inducing her illness by calling her a slut, which leads to her confinement. Annie John's confinement reflects Bertha/Antoinette's, but she can escape with the help of Ma Chess's obeah. This subverts the paradigm set up in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, where Antoinette's attempt at seduction using obeah makes Edward think she's insane enough to lock her up in his attic. Kincaid revises this scene in a way that ultimately allows for Annie John's queer island sexuality instead of hiding it away. While in a hallucinatory fit during her illness, Annie John washes her old family pictures. She focuses especially on a picture of her in her old confirmation dress, white like the dress Antoinette wears when trying to seduce Edward. Annie John washes the picture so hard it completely erases the dress, both a signifier of colonial enforced sexual purity and *Wide Sargasso Sea's* seduction scene. She denies the dress its symbolic power while revising its implications in previous textual incarnations.

*Annie John* plays with the trope about leaving the island written in *The Tempest* and *Jane Eyre* and signified in their postcolonial adaptations. These texts depict four different possibilities regarding a conclusion for island life: 1) the colonizer leaves the island but must give something up to do so, 2) the islander leaves the island and suf-

fers, 3) everyone remains stuck on the island, or 4) the islander leaves the island with the hope for a better life. *The Tempest* falls within the first category. To return to England, Prospero must swear off his powers and his books. This is displayed through the lens of audience interactivity, as the audience must clap to set him free from the island. Caliban's destiny is unclear: does Prospero leave him free on the island, or is he brought to England a slave? His final words onstage are a self-admonition to no longer believe in false idols. While Caliban here references his adulation for the false gods Stephano and Trinculo, his words also apply to his relationship with Prospero. He exposes the colonizer/colonized relationship, initially seen as an intellectual ideological rescue, as worship of a false idol. Even though he wields magical powers on the island, Prospero will become a dull fool when he gives up his powers and books in exchange for departure from the island. While the conclusion of island life in *The Tempest* ends with the colonizer sacrificing something to leave the island, *Jane Eyre* falls within the second category: the islander leaves the island and suffers. Bertha is given little to no backstory, and we as reader only see her as understood by Mr. Rochester. Although she potentially wished to leave Jamaica in search for a better life in England, which would place the book in category four, Bronte leaves her hopes and desires completely unexplored. Only Bertha's suffering after coming to England remains textually significant. She cannot achieve a successful marriage to

Mr. Rochester and therefore legitimize the colonizer/colonized relationship as something that can lead to equal partnership; instead, she leaves the island to live a nightmarish experience of confinement, isolation, and ultimately death. Her inability to have a happy ending demonstrates a biased view of islanders. Jane Eyre had arguably a more problematic past, with no parental ties to establish her gentility, but because she is a white English woman and not a colonized islander she is automatically found to be a better suited wife for Mr. Rochester.

In *A Tempest*, however, islander and colonizer alike remain on the island at the close of the play, which falls into the third category and denies the escapist ideal portrayed in *The Tempest*. Instead of writing a future for Caliban where he leaves the island, Césaire subverts the narrative to leave both colonizer and colonized on the island and therefore rewrite colonizer as colonized. By the conclusion of *A Tempest*, Caliban and his army of opossums have diminished Prospero into the dull fool invoked in *The Tempest*. After decrying the island's takeover by wild animals, Prospero mutters to himself the reversal of his and Caliban's relationship: "only you and me. You and me. You-me... me-you!" (Césaire 1969, 220-1). "You-me" becomes "me-you," which both shows their codependence and that Prospero is now the Other. Caliban does not care to reverse the oppressive lens, though, choosing instead to embrace island life and remain apathetic towards its intruder. He ignores Prospe-

ro's hailing and instead calls out to the sea "FREEDOM HI-DAY!" (Cesaire 1969, 222). While Prospero can now never be free, Caliban locates his freedom in his island home. The two remain forever on the island in a way that suggests the inescapability of the colonizer/colonized relationship. While Caliban wields supernatural powers by the close of the adaptation, his success is somewhat mitigated by his and Prospero's codependent relationship. *Wide Sargasso Sea*, however, falls between categories two and four. Antoinette leaves Jamaica in hopes for a loving honeymoon with her husband in Dominica. By the time she leaves Dominica for England, however, Rochester has decided her insane. She suffers until ending with the same fiery conclusion of *Jane Eyre*. This implies that Rochester believes that Europeans will always still see the island. *The Tempest* and *Annie John* both conclude with the promise of escaping the island setting. And in *Annie John*, the novel concludes with the narrator leaving her island home to go to nursing school in England, thus rewriting the notion of needing to disavow one's books to escape as put forth in *The Tempest*. While I argue that *Annie John* most explicitly references the source texts addressed here, the novel also cites other works of the British colonial canon and other texts that signify them. The radical rewriting that takes place in *Annie John* points out absences and issues in its source texts, such as colonialism and the need for queer, feminist islander representation; however, and possibly more significantly, it demonstrates the importance of revisionism itself. For years, people were satis-

fied with the powerful argument Césaire makes against race and colonial issues in the way Rhys reclaims the island and exposes Mr. Rochester's sexist colonial standards. The masculinist view of *A Tempest* and racism still prevalent in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and the heteronormativity of both texts, remained unchallenged because these adaptations were good enough. However, in *Annie John* Kincaid revises these adaptations and their source texts to show that revision is never complete.

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*Political Ontology and Post-colonial Poetry: A Study of Nol Alembong's The Passing Wind and Titus Moetsabi's Fruits and Other Poems*

Eric Nsuh Zumboshi

**Introduction**

The period of the 1990s is very important in African history and political discourse because it saw the re-introduction of political pluralism in Africa after almost thirty years of dictatorship and totalitarianism in the continent. In fact, Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle paint a vivid picture of the political atmosphere of this period when they note that “The first half of

the 1990s saw widespread political turbulence across the African continent” and the transition “from one party and military regimes started with political protests, evolved through liberalisation reforms, often culminated in competitive elections, and usually ended with the installation of new forms of regimes”. They also state that “While not unfolding uniformly and to the same extent everywhere, these movements and institutional rearrangements were evident in some degree in almost all African countries” (Bratton and Wallet 1977, 3). These descriptions and commentaries on the political situation in Africa during this period translate the unvarnished fact that the transition from political monism to political pluralism in Africa was not a smooth ride but a clash of the titans because many political conservatives rejected his wave of political revisionism.

The re-introduction of political pluralism in the 1990s also had far-reaching effects on the ideological orientation of many African writers as could be read in their works. The impress of 1990 African politics on African literature has not been unexpected and un-previewed because creativity does not find expression in an extra-terrestrial hemisphere but within a socio-political and cultural context. Consequently, every political epoch produces its own literature to serve as interpretation of its activities and times. Leonard B. Meyer justifies this idea when he contends that “Our awareness of time – the causal chain of history - provides the framework

within which we interpret and understand works of art” ( Meyer 1964, 293). Many African writers, during this period, used their art to clamour for political liberalization which they hoped was going to catapult their various countries to the pinnacle of success and good living. Consequently, the literary and cultural texts that were produced during this period fall within the genre of resistance literature as described by Barbara Harlow who postulates that resistance literature “calls attention to itself and to literature in general, as a political and politicized activity” because “The literature of resistance sees itself furthermore as immediately and directly involved in a struggle against ascendant or dominant forms of ideological and cultural production”( Harlow 1987, 28-29).

In this guise, Wole Soyinka argues that “The artist has always functioned in African societies as the record of the mores and experiences of his society and as the voice of vision in his own time” ( Soyinka, 1969, 21). In other words, Soyinka strongly endorses the idea that African literature should perform a functional role in the African context and the artist/writer should shun the Kantian doctrine of art for art’s sake in favour of art for social and political commitment. The production of politically committed and functional art was the clarion call of many African writers in the 1990s who saw their artistic vocation as a call to duty to help advance the democratization process as revealed in Nol Alembong’s *The Passing Wind* and Titus Moetsabi’s *Fruits and Other*

*Poems.* This paper, therefore, aims at analyzing the poetry of Alembong and Moetsabi in order to articulate the response of African poets to the re-introduction of political liberalism in Africa in the 1990s. In this guise, the paper posits that many African poets of the 1990 era are committed towards the political project of exposing anti-democratic political structures in their society. In their critique of these structures, the poets indirectly clamour for resistance against these structures and the strategies which are being used towards stifling the manifest democratic sentiments in their social context.

For the purpose of conceptual clarity, it is imperative to define the concept of *political ontology*. In philosophy, ontology is connected to human consciousness and existence. It is a branch of metaphysics which studies being in general and embraces a plethora of issues or discourses which allude to the nature of human existence and the issue of reality. In this view, political ontology is a concept in contemporary political science that studies man as a political being and his activities within a specific political reality. Political ontologists such as Charles Tilly, Robert E. Goodin, and Colin Tilly contend that political analysis cannot be ontologically neutral because politics is a human activity that finds expression within a specific ontological reality. Thus, Colin Hay affirms that “Ontology relates to being, to what is, to what exists, to the constituent units of reality; political ontology, by extension, relates to *political being*, to what is politically, to what *exists*

*politically*, and to the units that comprise political reality ( Hay 2006, 80). In a nutshell, political ontology analyses the consciousness, awareness and discussions of the conditions of man in his political milieu and the willingness and determination to improve on his condition in the said political reality. Thus, the political ontologist seeks not just to describe and analyze a particular political reality and existence; his ultimate purpose is to change that reality and make it comfortable for human habitation.

### **Alembong and Moetsabi: Political Consciousness in African Poetry**

Aristotle, in chapter two of *On the Art of Poetry*, argues that literature/poetry deals with societal activities with man at the centre of these activities. Also, in the opening lines of *The Politics* Aristotle further contends that man by his nature is a political animal. From a syllogistic reasoning, if man is a political creature and literature, or poetry as the case maybe, is the result of man's creativity and ingenuity, then literature is political in all perspectives. Furthermore, the British novelist, George Orwell, notes that creativity cannot be free from socio-political consciousness because "no book is free from political bias. The opinion that art should have nothing to do with politics is itself a political attitude" ( Orwell 1966, 777). With these arguments in mind, African literature is political because the African writer is not a hermit but a socio-political being who is an integral member of his

community and his writings are influenced by the political and cultural activities of his immediate community in time and space. The Zimbabwe literary and cultural critic, Emmanuel Ngara, upsurges the debate further when he notes that literature is linked to the socio-political realities of the writer because “every writer represents certain ideological concerns and class interests” (Ngara 1988, 128). Consequently, he acknowledges that “In modern Africa literature has so far tended to oppose the ideology of the ruling class. Committed writers see the exploitation of their fellow citizens and the mismanagement of the economies in their countries and feel with the continent and with the masses” (Ngara 1988, 130).

Many African writers, in the 1990s, deeply participated through their works in the political discourses of the era. In fact, these writers were interested not only in the aesthetic virility of their works but also in the correctness of the political contents of their works. In this connection Bate Besong<sup>1</sup>, in an interview with Pierre Fandio says, inter alia, that: “Art provides the writer the arena in which to explore political ideas as refracted through human character. Literature deals with human beings and their relationships over time in space” (Besong 1993, 5). It is within this context that in 1991 in Anglophone Cameroonian poet, Nol Alembong, published his maiden collection of poems entitled *The Passing Wind*. Most of the poems in this collection reflect the political change and impasse that swept across Africa during this period and



Cameroon in particular although a few of the poems handle other discursive issues such as the conflict between tradition and modernism. This collection, therefore, contains poetic expressions which are functional in vision and depict the political and socio-cultural realities of the post-colonial African society at the time – realities such as political injustice, corruption, dictatorship, political sycophancy, and social revolution and upheavals.

Michael Chapman, in paraphrasing Chinua Achebe, argues that “It is expected that the African writer addresses the big socio-political issues of the day. The writer who does not do so may end up being considered irrelevant” (Chapman 2007, 154). Nol Alembong projects himself as an anti-establishment poet because his poetic discourse exposes the socio-political anomalies and tribulations of the 1990 African society in highly symbolic terms through his ample use of African local imagery, cultural symbolism and African folklore. Thus, the title of this collection *The Passing Wind* symbolizes a political and revolutionary change from one system of governance to the other. Evidently, the discourse of political revolt is seen in “Come, Brothers...” where Alembong rallies the post-colonial masses to revolt against the post-colonial political establishment because the leaders are not working for their benefit. The poem, therefore, is a clarification call for political activism as seen in its first stanza:

Come, brothers.....  
The dog of the house calls.

Come, stand on the anthill  
and let the mound give way  
under your weight. (Alembong 1991, 7)

The poet-persona calls the masses “brothers” in order to show the unity and commitment that exist among the downtrodden citizens. More so, the “dog of the house” is a metaphor for the revolutionary leader and “the anthill” symbolizes the irresponsible, unpatriotic, and tyrannical post-colonial regimes whose rulers are more interested in their personal aggrandizement and have no communitarian vision.

The speaker, further, exhorts the citizens to stop complaining and weeping but “Grove” their “way up the anthill” so that “the mound may give way/ under your weight”. These words remind the masses that they are not helpless and should not resign to fate but take a political and pragmatic approach in overthrowing these irresponsible leaders. The poet, consequently, harbours Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s philosophy of social contract in political governance where he argues that “What man loses by the social contract is his natural liberty and the absolute right to anything that tempts him and that he can take; what he gains by the social contract is civil liberty and the right of property” ( Rousseau 1968, 65). In other words, the relationship between citizens and their leaders is like a social pact where the leaders guarantee a comfortable live for their citizens while the citizens surrender some of their rights to them. In a context

where the leaders are not working for the common will, the citizens have the right to remove these leaders either through democratic means or through revolution.

In addition, the speaker encourages the masses not to be afraid of the “stink” of the “queen ant”, a symbolism of the post-colonial tyrant. In fact, he poses the question: “But what does it matter if one is stunk/in the dust of the mound?” (Rousseau 1968, 7) By this rhetorical question, the poet-persona is aware that the post-colonial dictatorial establishment will not relent any effort to subdue any uprising against it. Mindful of this fact, the poet uses this rhetorical question to give courage to the masses not to give up in the face of tyranny. For Chinua Achebe argues in *Arrow of God* that no man however strong can win a war against his clan. In a nutshell, the ideological posture of the poet-persona is one of collective consciousness and social revolt. He believes that the post-colonial society cannot be changed by an individual but through the principle of collectivism and communitarianism. The call for revolutionary change in Alembong’s collection is finally realized in the poem “The Passing Wind” which happens to be the title-poem of his collection. This poem further strengthens Alembong’s ideological consciousness as a poet who believes in social revolution within the framework of Marxist-socialist philosophy. The first stanza of the poem begins with poetic suspense when the poet-persona says:

It came suddenly  
And caught us as if unawares  
It came limping  
As a child learning to walk  
It came naively  
As a chameleon in a race to immortality. (Alembong  
1991, 6)

The repeated use of the neutral personal pronoun “It” creates an atmosphere of suspense in the poem since the reader does not know what the “it” signifies. Furthermore, the poet-persona in the second stanza of the poem, shows the consequence and destruction in the land as a result of this unknown “it”. Through the use of detailed description and insightful metaphors, the poet-persona notes that their “soft lips/Turn to scabs”; their “tough soil/Cracked to let microbes in”; their “trees/Shiver in their shoes” and “Drop their leaves in a falling sickness” (Alembong 1991, 6) etc. All these environmental destructions show the far-reaching effect that this phenomenon had on the natural environment and the people. It is only in the last stanza of the poem that a poet makes it clear that he is talking about a “wind” which symbolizes a violent political change. The poet says:

And when we looked round  
To see what was driving things mad  
We saw that it was  
The passing wind. (Alembong 1991, 6)

The revolutionary consciousness is also found in “And

it Flowed”, a poem which is dedicated to B.B. This abbreviation stands for Bole Butake one of the most prolific and radical Anglophone Cameroonian playwrights who published a play in 1990 entitled *And Palm Wine Will Flow*. This play at the time was very prophetic of political change in Cameroon and post-colonial Africa in general. When Alembong dedicates this poem to him, it shows that he shares in the revolutionary consciousness of Bole Butake as expressed in his play. The speaker in the poem narrates an account of a revolution that gripped and cleansed “Mandela’s earth” which is a metonymy for African as a whole. The speaker says:

Alas!  
The Labourer burrowed the soil –  
How dry its every pore!-  
To reach tap-root’s end  
For a drop for thirsty throats  
  
And at dead end prophetic voices  
Announced the sap flow:  
AND PALM-WINE WILL FLOW! (Alem  
bong 1991,32)

The poem begins with an exclamation “Alas!” which is a semiotic sign to show that the people had been waiting tirelessly for this revolution before the “Labourer burrowed the soil”. The image of the labourer is metaphorical of the leader of the revolution and the dryness of “its every pore” portrays the difficulties and

complexity that the revolutionaries went through before succeeding. And finally, “it flowed”. More so, in the remaining section of the poem, the speaker brings out the devastating effects of the revolution and gives “a red feather for the neophyte!” The speaker says:

And it flowed to unleash the Nixons  
From the splendor of Watergate palaces  
To the slimy gutter of destitution

And it flowed, and swept miasma to Hades,  
And the testimony became our hagiology  
Ah, a red feather for the neophyte! (Alembong 1991,  
32)

Through the ample use of biblical and historical allusions, the speaker declares that the revolution was strong and violent that it even “unleash the Nixons” from “the splendor of Watergate palaces”. This alludes to Richard Nixon, the American president who resigned in 1974 because of what became known in American political history as the “Watergate Scandal”. This historical allusion shows that even renowned rulers and tyrants could not resist this change but succumbed to it. Also, this change brought about the change of roles and status as the leaders were forced out from their palaces “To the slimy gutters of destitution” (Alembong 1991, 32). The poet is therefore sensitizing post-colonial leaders that no leader no matter how strong can never be more than the people. In fact, in contemporary times the situations

in Burkina Faso, Tunisia, Egypt, and Madagascar are glaring examples of how a people can dethrone their leaders through popular uprising or social revolution.

Nol Alembong, through the technique of memory, narrates the lives of historical personalities who were freedom fighters in their country in order to inspire the masses in post-colonial Africa to continue in the footsteps of these nationalists in the liberation of post-1990 Africa. In “Steve Biko and His Fist”, the poet narrates the history of the black South African freedom fighter, Steve Biko, and the role that he played in the dismantlement of apartheid. In this narrative poem, the poet portrays his deeds by presenting him as an extended metaphor of a nationalist whose radicalism is worth emulating in revolting against undemocratic institutions in post-colonial Africa. In the opening stanza of the poem, the narrator declares that Steve Biko “rose to the height of the baobab/not to harvest nuts from the tallest palms/but to clear the place of cobwebs.” (Alembong 1991, 39) These lines show Biko’s nationalistic vision as one who is unassuming and more concerned in seeing that his society is cleared from “cobwebs” – an image which symbolizes the ills of his society.

In a conversational manner between the poet-persona and his audience, he narrates the political exploits of Steve Biko from when he was born up to when he became a nationalist and freedom activist in South Africa. The poet affirms Steve Biko’s participation and role in fighting against

racial superiority in South Africa which was disadvantageous to South African blacks. The poet-speaker says:

They say the house in which they live  
has rooms of different sizes and books.  
They say they all live in different rooms  
and no door opens to the other  
They say they are like children from  
the same vagina living like cats and dogs,  
with none able to force a smile from the  
others

And this Steve Biko  
gave up father and mother  
gave up brothers and sisters  
gave up wife and children  
to throw down and to root out  
the walls that divided this house  
the walls that made this house  
as divided as the fingers are. (Alembong  
1991, 40)

From the above-extract, “the house” is an extended metaphor of South Africa while the “rooms of different sizes and looks” are representative of the different racial components in the country. Steve Biko undertook a campaign “to throw down” and “to root out” “the walls that divided this house” which, in other words, is his fight against apartheid in South Africa. The speaker, further, affirms that Steve Biko’s radicalism against the apartheid system caused “a rope” to be “thrown round his neck, as we do to catch pig” and “For this, they flung



him into a fence” (Alembong 1991, 42) where he eventually met his death. Consequently, Biko’s fight against apartheid depicts him as one who is selfless and has a nationalistic spirit; he does not only think about himself but also his entire community. At the end of the poem, the poet glorifies Steve Biko and attests that South Africa is now enjoying freedom because of the exploits of Steve Biko. The poet says “the flame of that fire/ continues to burn bright in that country” and “Today/ the flame of that fire is making/ the people see through the fog over the land” (Alembong 1991, 43). From the above lines, the poet brings the reader to self-consciousness that the effort of an individual can liberate a people from the claws of tyranny and injustice in his society.

Furthermore, Alembong sounds a note of hope in this collection when he predicts the inevitable doom of irresponsible African rulers. These prophetic revelations are articulated in poems such as “Wait” and “Some Day for Sure”. In these poems, the poet edifies the post-colonial masses to be patient because these post-colonial leaders are not eternal. In the poem “Wait”, the poet begins with a rhetorical question: “Why do you make vain/ To climb this baobab tree of ours?” (Alembong 1991, 11). The “baobab tree” has been used as a metaphor of political power where the poet advises the post-colonial masses that they should not hasten to seize power from their leaders which might be in vain. He further states that even in the midst of suffering which he express-

es in metaphorical language such as “the rags over your nakedness”, which may “spark your heart” to “crimson readiness”, they should still exercise patience. The poem ends with a rhetorical question thus: “But why waste stones on birds/When the elephant-hunt is yet to come? /Every dog has its day” (Alembong 1991, 11). The same discourse runs across “Some Day for Sure”, when the poet articulates the same hope and optimism. The title of this poem, in itself, resonates elements of prophecy and futurism. The poet reverberates hope in the future despite the present sociopolitical melancholy of the masses. This very short poem goes thus:

Oh, how snake-like the trembling cry  
Twines the small of my brains!  
The feeble cords of that voice  
Spell the agonies of the Tortoise  
Down trodden by the Elephant.  
But for how long will this last  
When the Tortoise’s shell is hard to crack?  
The journey may be too long and hard,  
But was the chameleon not the first  
To drum the long-awaited message of death?  
Where was Dog that thought  
The race was his? (Alembong 1991, 20)

In the same context Moetsabi’s *Fruits and Other Poems*, published in 1992, laments on the situation of his country after independence and that of the Southern African sub-region in general. Just like his contemporary Nol Al-

embong, Titus Moetsabi in his poetry identifies himself with the suffering masses of his society and serves as the legitimate herald of the problems and worries of this social group. To this effect, Ngugi wa Thiong'o argues: "The writer as a human being is himself a product of history, of time and space. As a member of society, he belongs to certain class and he is inevitably a participant in the class struggle of his times" (Thiong'o 1981, 72). On this basis, Moetsabi's poems handle a variety of discourses which range from colonial subjugation, identity crisis, class stratification, leadership crisis, nationalism, and Pan-Africanism. In a nutshell, Moetsabi is a poet whose commitment is directed towards the plight of the down-trodden in his society which, in most cases, is brought by the misuse or abuse of power by postcolonial politicians.

Diana Brydon notes that postcolonialism does not deny "history's textualized accessibility" but "focuses on the reality of a past that has influenced the present" (Brydon 1995, 142). Titus Moetsabi in his poetry demonstrates a great affinity to historical discourse and how it has shaped or influenced the socio-political, and cultural conditions of the postcolonial citizen. In fact, postcolonial writings are usually tied to the apron's string of history for as Bate Besong contends: "A writer who has no sense of history is like a sparrow without wings, for the writer must be the visionary of living truth" (Besong 1993, 15). In "Rufaro", Moetsabi discusses the impact of colonial history on the ideological and existential consciousness of postcolo-

nial Zimbabweans and Africans as a whole. The speaker argues that the present despicable state of Zimbabwe and Africa in general is due to the ills of colonialism and slave trade. The speaker affirms in the opening lines:

Zimbabwe the dying culture  
Africa the dwindling roots  
of kingdoms abused  
they took all  
left whisky to blow the mind  
was it not the storming of petrol depot  
that lit city and country  
that sent abusers aflight  
when afternoon pain  
conceived our gift. (Moetsabi 1992, 5)

The speaker, metaphorically, describes Zimbabwe as “the dying culture” and Africa as “the dwindling roots” (Moetsabi 1992, 5). The use of diction such as “dying” and “dwindling”, portrays a society which is in the state of stagnation and dispossession (Moetsabi 1992, 5). It shows generalized dystopia and hopelessness in contemporary Africa and in a way, the poet is awakening the African people to re-think their existence and not to bow to the dictates of their past. In addition, the poet does not only criticize the colonial masters for their dubious and exploitative nature; he also criticizes the Africans for their gullibility and shortsightedness where the colonialists, who came to Africa, “took all” and “left whisky to blow the mind” (Moetsabi 1992, 5).

The speaker precedes further and shows the manifestation of the destruction of Zimbabwean culture by the forces of colonialism. Those cultural sign-posts that were indicative of Africa's rich cultural patrimony have been destroyed by the ills of slavery and colonialism. The speaker laments:

where lies the horn  
that tore the moon's hymen  
where lies the drum  
what savaged April nightness  
enrapturing cold Rufaro with summer  
fruits. (Moetsabi 1992, 5)

In the above-stanza, "the horn" that "tore the moon's hymen" and "the drum" that "savaged April nightness" and "enrapturing cold Rufaro with summer fruits" are African cultural metaphors that have been destroyed by the colonialists (Moetsabi 1992,5). In a nutshell, the poet laments on the crushing effect of colonialism on Africans – an effect which has made them not to have a national culture. In a way, therefore, the contemporary African is still undergoing the process of colonialism as Frantz Fanon argues that "Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it" (Fanon 1995, 154). This poem, therefore, interrogates

the present situation of Zimbabwe and educates African citizens to re-think and ameliorate their situation.

In addition, Moetsabi's poetic discourse handles the discursive issues of nationalism and decolonization. According to him, national consciousness is an on-going struggle since nationalism creates power by making more men available for participation in its larger community. In "The Return", he narrates the history of Zimbabwe's fight for independence and the role that the people, through the charismatic leadership of Robert Mugabe, played in this struggle. It could be inferred that the poet goes back to the history of Zimbabwe's fight for independence to educate the people that they should use the same determination to fight for nation-building in their society. The ample use of historical material in this poem also shows the faithful confluence between literature and history – which in this context Laurence Lerner argues that: "the world of fiction "is not isolated but "overlaps with the world of history (Lerner 2004, 439-440)

The title of the poem reminds one of soldiers who went for a battle, defeated their enemies and are now returning home triumphantly. The poem begins with a scene of jubilation and euphoria of the people who have just won a battle. The speaker describes the parade of these people as "thunderous boots" in order to show the determination and agility of the soldiers. They were also "loud smiles/jumping/dancing/twisting/turning and singing"

with “clenched fists upraised” (Moetsabi 1992, 3). The fists of these people are “upraised” which is a symbol of victory over the colonial master and his agents. The poet further describes the country as “great Zimbabwe rises” and how “pillars of the district commissioners house/collapse(s)” when the crowd, “in deafening rumbling” attacked it (Moetsabi, 1992, 3). The description of Zimbabwe in such superlative terms depicts the poet’s patriotic sentiments for his fatherland which further strengthens his pan-Africanist tendency. Also, the district commissioner is a semiotic representation of the colonial master and the collapse of his house emblemizes the end of colonialism and the acquisition of political and constitutional independence. These expressions depict the fierce struggle that the Zimbabweans went through fighting for their independence. Although the activities take place in Zimbabwe, the poem depicts painful processes that Africans went through in the fight for independence. In this case, Zimbabwe becomes a metaphor for Africa while Mugabe symbolizes African freedom leaders.

The pernicious effects of neo-colonialism on Africa are also some of the thematic articulations in the poetry of Titus Moetsabi. The poet argues that the involvement of western capitalist states in the internal politics of post-colonial Africa has a serious repercussion on Africa’s socio-economic development and political stability. He, thereby, indicts African states to solve their internal issues without Western intervention. Phillip G. Altbach

gives more strength to Moetsabi's views in his argument that neocolonialism differs from traditional colonialism in that "it does not involve direct political control, leaving substantial leeway to the developing country" (Altbach 1995, 452). He reiterates that this new form of colonialism is similar to direct colonialism because it also concerns the "domination by the advanced nation over the developing country remain" (Altbach 1995, 452). Consequently, "Neocolonialism", he argues "is partly a planned policy of advanced nations to maintain their influence in developing countries, but is also simply a continuation of past practices (Altbach 1995, 452). In "Bare Denial", Moetsabi attacks Western involvement in the internal politics of Africans. This involvement is a typical trade-mark in post-colonial African politics where Western countries, through multinational companies, are deeply involved in the political discourses of contemporary Africa. It is widely believed in Africa that these comprador Western capitalists in African politics only help to set the continent ablaze as could be seen in cases like the crises in Ivory Coast, Libya, Zimbabwe, and Central African Republic. Using Angola as an extended metaphor, the poet declares that Angola should be allowed to solve her internal problems alone because "fleas on Angola/continue gnawing and sucking/the blood" (Moetsabi 1992, 12). Kwame Nkrumah in *Africa Must Unite*, strengthens this view in his argument that neocolonialism and balkanization are the greatest dangers facing African countries after the



acquisition of political independence (Nkrumah 1963, 174). The metaphor of the “fleas” symbolizes the Western imperialist who continue to ‘suck’ the “blood” of Angola and the African continent in general (Moetsabi 1992, 12). The poet, in these metaphors, shows the exploitative propensity of Western nations which is compared to a flea that sucks blood from a human being.

According to the speaker, Angola should be left alone because “the lie” – that is Western manipulation – “is clear as stars/in the black night” (Moetsabi 1992, 12). Through this figure of comparison, the poet criticizes neocolonial manipulation and invites Angolans to do the same. In fact, the situation that the Angolans find themselves, in the poem, is aptly articulated by Chinua Achebe, in *Arrow of God*, that when two brothers fight, the stranger takes away their goods. In order to show the political and mutual solidarity among African nations, the poet concludes that “Angola shall drink peace/because she is the not alone” (Moetsabi 1992, 12). The speaker says:

When Angola talks  
the people of the land  
smile dance and hold arms  
they go with steel irises  
singing the sweet notes  
‘leave Angola alone,  
She is not alone.’ (Moetsabi 1992, 12)

Furthermore, Oyeniyi Okunoye argues that African literature derives its relevance and utilitarian nature “from its responsiveness to the collective African experience” and concludes that “its form and concerns have been conditioned by the reality of the colonial engagement, either in the sense of betraying the overwhelming European presence or of asserting the African will to authentic self-expression” (Okunoye 200, 119). Okunoye’s theoretical foundation finds expression in Titus Moetsabi’s poetic discourse where he articulates the postcolonial discourses of patriotism and self-sacrifice as could be read in “Goodbye Mother”. Ideologically, the poet expostulates that the postcolonial African society is in a quagmire of despair and privation because most Africans have lost their sense of patriotism and collective humanism, making self-aggrandizement and egoism the political culture of Africa. In the above-poem he holds that, for his country to develop there must be national and republican consciousness and not the vice of individualism which has bedeviled the entire postcolonial world. In the poem, the speaker/persona is a freedom fighter who has left his family to take part in the freedom struggle against the colonial master. He bids “Goodbye” to his mother because it is probable that he might be killed in the battlefield. The speaker, in the first stanza, says:

Goodbye mother  
I go to fight  
In the furious forests

Sleeping in caves  
But mother  
Shed no tears. (Moetsabi 1992, 60)

In the above-stanza, metaphors such as “the furious forests” and will be “sleeping in caves” show the seriousness of the struggle and the commitment of the speaker in the battle (Moetsabi 1992, 60). Similarly, the speaker gives a vivid description of the battle when he says “bayonets which tore flesh at Chimoio” are “feeding human flesh to jackals” in order to show the bestial nature and complexities of the struggle (Moetsabi 1992, 60). He, further, wishes that his country, Zimbabwe, “with each sunset”, “were born/ as the womb swells” (Moetsabi 1992, 60). With these expressions, the speaker hopes that his country will be set free from the claws of colonialism with the shining of “the freedom flame” (Moetsabi 1992, 60). At the end of the poem, the speaker says:

I stab!  
die Douglas and Abel  
this calabash of your blood  
I feed  
to hounds. (Moetsabi 1992, 60)

The stabbing of “Douglas” and “Abel”, who are extended metaphors of the colonial masters and their agents, projects the inevitable collapse of the colonial system and the usher in freedom in Zimbabwe and the African world in general. The poet is sounding a clarion call

to postcolonial African citizens that the strength they used in fighting against the colonial master should also be used in building their society for the common good.

Titus Moetsabi does not forget about the critical discourses of identity and ethnocentrism in his society because they are critical issues that have bedeviled the African continent since independence. A cursory analysis of political crisis in post-colonial Africa will lead to the conclusion that ethnocentricity is at the nerve centre of all these problems. Although Stuart Hall had argued that every human being is “ethnically located and our ethnic identities are crucial to our subjective sense of who we are” (Hall 1995, 227), it is not a safe harbour for the postcolonial subject to indulge in ethnocentric tendencies. In “My identity”, the speaker criticizes those who practice ethnic segregation and want to attach themselves only to those of their tribe and language. These people fallaciously see themselves and their tribes as superior to other. The entire poem goes thus:

Blinkered country folk  
withhold fruits  
from other farmers of the struggle  
because  
of differing roots

fellow country folk  
colours of our trunks branches and  
leaves

textures of our intentions  
Will always differ

some came from the west  
others came from the east  
some came from the south  
others came from the north

I am proud to have come to my home  
I am proud to declare my identity  
Name ... Zimbabwe  
Totem ... Africa. (Moetsabi 1992, 15)

This poem portrays that there is ethnic discrepancy in his society. The “blinker country folk” are those myopic citizens whose visions do not go beyond their tribes (Moetsabi 1992, 15). The ideas of withholding “fruit/ from other farmer of the struggle” because “of differing roots” show a society which is inflamed with ethnic antagonism (Moetsabi 1992, 15). It is ironical that these people, at the time of the struggle were together but after the struggle, they are fragmented on ethnic lines. The poet, thus, deconstructs the notion of race and ethnicity and tacitly argues that diversity in identity does not necessarily result to identity/ethnic conflict. This ethnic rivalry only comes to light when ethnicity is politicised by the political elite when they manipulate the post-colonial masses to think that some ethnic groups are more superior than others. The speaker, therefore, projects a multicultural discourse that the postcolonial citizen should accept diversity and collaborate with one another.

Finally, Titus Moetsabi interrogates the present political mayhem in postcolonial Africa and the misuse of political power by African leaders who are driven by the politics of rigid individualism as opposed to that of communitarianism. In relation to this, Martin Meredith notes that “Africa has suffered grievously at the hands of its Big Men and its ruling elite. Their preoccupation, above all, has been to hold power for the purpose of self-enrichment. The patrimonial systems they have used to sustain themselves in power have drained away a huge proportion of state resources” (Meredith 2005, 687). The poet sides with the suffering masses and believes that the postcolonial political elite is responsible for the inhuman conditions lived by the downtrodden masses. The gross abuse of political power is articulated in “The Servile” – a short poem which goes thus:

The megalomaniacs  
Subdue and subject  
the servile  
to toil  
while like bed bugs  
they drain the last blood. (Moetsabi 1992, 30)

## Conclusion

In summary, this paper examined the poetry of Titus Moetsabi and Nol Alembong to show the response of

African poets following the democratic wind of change that blew across the entire African continent in the 1990s. The paper sustained the premise that African poets of this era were engaged in exposing the post-colonial anti-democratic political structures in their society. The poets, therefore, were clamouring for resistance against such structures and strategies which are being used in stifling the manifest democratic sentiments of the post-colonial African masses. The content and form of these poems portray the ideological consciousness of the poets which is analogous to communitarian consciousness and nation-building. Furthermore, the analysis of these poems show that every historical epoch comes with its own literature which serves as a mirror of the activities of the epoch. However, from a liberal humanist perspective, it should be mentioned that although these poems were published in the 1990s, they are still relevant in today's Africa because very little has changed from the time they were published to present.

**Notes:**

1. Bate Besong is a radical Anglophone Cameroonian playwright and critic who also published in the 1990s. His works falls amongst the most radical and militant writings that were published in the 1990s.



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*Postcolonial Memory,  
Queer Nationality, and  
Modernity in Shyam Sel-  
vadurai's Funny Boy*

Ayendy Bonifacio

**Introduction**

Those spend-the-days, the remembered innocence of childhood, are now colored in the hues of twilight sky. It is a picture made even more sentimental by the loss of all that was associated with them. By all of us having to leave Sri Lanka a year later because of communal violence and forge a new home for ourselves in Canada. (Sevadurai 1994, 5)

In Minoli Salgado's study of political resistance and Sri Lankan literature in English, she claims that the major

problem confronting the critic of Sri Lankan literature is “the problem of negotiating the relationship between historical events, historiography and literary fiction” (Salgado 2007, 5). Sri Lankan literature, she continues, “is increasingly read in terms of its relationship to the country’s ethnic conflict and the ability to narrate history as it is being made” (Salgado 2007, 5). In Shyam Selvadurai’s 1994 novel *Funny Boy*, nostalgia and memory constitute an attempt to understand the violence of cultural-national severance while at the same time telling the story of a Tamilian boy named Arjie, his sexuality, and family conflicts. *Funny Boy* is framed in the throes of the Sri Lankan Civil War (1983-2009). It is narrated in a reflective first-person past tense that weaves a postcolonial past with the novel’s present. *Funny Boy*’s setting makes it difficult to excise the novel’s relationship to history, that is, the anti-Tamil pogrom of 1983 from Arjie’s coming-of-age story. Reading *Funny Boy* in terms of its representation of postcolonial memory allows us to merge Arjie’s individual memory of his childhood and the broader racial/communal memory of the Sri Lankan nation state.

In this paper, I argue that *Funny Boy* presents two important modes of postcolonial memory: First there is the nostalgic mode, a way of longing for a fleeting colonial past which haunts the cultural consciousness of colonial sympathizers in the novel. Second, there is the traumatic retrospective mode. Arjie’s postcolonial memory demonstrates a compelling rendition of cultural trauma induced

by pernicious ethnic and civil conflicts and an overpowering cultural homophobia. The two modes of postcolonial memory merge Arjie's individual coming-of-age story with the civil, ethnic, and social conflicts that culminate in one of Sri Lanka's most politically vexed years. The individual restraint and violence inflicted on Arjie's sexuality parallels the restraint and violence of Sri Lankan nationalism. The oppositional force that generates this restraint and violence in the novel is the irreconcilability of the past and present, the normative and non-normative, and, ultimately, the modern and non-modern.

## Colonial Nostalgia

In *Funny Boy*, colonial nostalgia is the longing for an elusive colonial past attached to Western forms of history and knowledge. We see this nostalgic mode in Arjie's memory of Queen Victoria Academy, a school whose namesake, Queen Victoria, denotes Britain's long imperial rule over Sri Lanka (Ceylon) between 1815 and 1948. In the chapter "The Best School of 'Them All,'" Arjie remembers having to memorize two poems for Principal Black Tie, one was "Vitae Lampada," and the other, the eponymous title of chapter "The Best School of 'Them All.'" Both poems remember an idealized colonial past. Arjie articulates a dissonance between the poems' idealization of colonial customs and the customs that he sees in Queen Victoria Academy. For example, "Vitae Lampada" is about the game of

cricket, “but not cricket the way I understood it. [The poem] said that through playing cricket one learned to be honest and brave and patriotic. This was not true at the Victoria Academy” (Selvadurai 1994, 227). “*Vitae Lampada’s*” moralization of cricket does not coincide with what cricket actually means to Arjie and his peers at the Victoria Academy: “Cricket, here, consisted of trying to make it on the first-eleven team by any means, often by cheating or by fawning over the cricket master. Cricket was anything but honest” (Selvadurai 1994, 227). Arjie’s distinction between what cricket means “here,” as opposed to what it means there, that is in England and Australia, reframes the colonial tone of the poem and highlights “*Vitae Lampada’s*” coercive cultural message on colonial subjects. Arjie’s reading of the poem is critical of the school’s neocolonial mindset. For Arjie, cricket is metonym for Anglo-imperial power, which “is anything but honest” (Selvadurai 1994, 227). The dissonance between what “*Vitae Lampada*” was meant to recall (honesty, bravery, and patriotism) and what the poem actually recalls (cheating and dishonesty) presents a disconnect between a Sri Lankan colonial past and the country’s still unfolding neocolonial present.

The second poem, “The Best School of All,” is another nostalgic rendition of a cultural ethos that is no longer relevant but cherished by some of the school’s authorities. In “The Best School of All,” “the poet looked back on his school days as the best days of his life. I found it puzzling that one would be nostalgic for



something one had long to escape” (Selvadurai 1994, 226-227). Like in the case of “*Vitae Lampada*,” Arjie’s reading of “The Best School of Them All” calls into question the idealization of a colonial and Eurocentric past. Arjie’s own experience at Queen Victoria Academy was not like the speakers’ in these poems. Riddled with a residual colonial history and pride, Queen Victoria Academy is a repressive postcolonial space that muffles Arjie’s queer identity. In a sense, Queen Victoria Academy wages epistemic violence on Arjie and those like him, who do not share a sense of belonging towards a colonial past. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that the “Clearest available example . . . of epistemic violence is the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogenous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other. This project is also the asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of the Other in its precarious Subjectivity” (Spivak 1988, 280-81). Queen Victoria Academy’s nostalgic postcolonial memory of imperial customs and power constitute a colonial past that interpellates Arjie as Other. Queen Victoria Academy disseminates signs of a colonial past with “*Vitae Lampada*” and “The Best School of Them All.” Such signs are the erasure of Arjie’s precarious subjectivity and the subjectivity of a society at the margins of a colonial power.

## **Traumatic Restrospective Retellings**

Arjie recalls restraint and repression as heteronormative structures that kept him othered, queered, and “funny.”

This is made clear in the novel's first chapter "Pigs Can't Fly," where Arjie is interpellated as a "funny boy." In reference to this chapter, Gayatri Gopinath claims, "the first story in *Funny Boy*, lays out the complex system of prohibition, punishment, and compulsion that governs and structures gender differentiation" (Gopinath 2005, 170). After Arjie is discovered playing "bride-bride" with his girl cousins, one of the adults tells Arjie's father "you have a funny one here" (Selvadurai 1994, 14). From there on, Arjie is no longer permitted to play with the girls. This act of interpellation identifies a non-normative behavior, classifying Arjie as a deviant other, which prevents him from acting out his natural inclinations. When he asked his mother why he could no longer play with girls, she glibly replies: "because the sky is so high and pigs can't fly, that's why" (Selvadurai 1994, 19). Her response alludes to basic natural truths of which Arjie's sexuality has no part. Gopinath claims that "the gender specialization of the domestic sphere in the story mirrors and reiterates nationalist framings of space that posit the 'inner' as an atavistic space of spirituality and tradition, embodied by the figure of the woman, as opposed to the 'outer' male sphere of progress politics, materiality, and modernity" (Gopinath 2005, 171). This is most evident in Arjie's desire to play "bride-bride" with his girl cousins as his brother Diggy and the other boys play separately in the "outer" quarters of the house. Once the adults are made aware of Arjie's queer disposition, he is displaced from the "inner" domestic space (the feminized private sphere) to the "outer"

part of house (the masculinized public sphere) to play with the boys. When Arjie is displaced from the “inner” space, we begin to see competing discourses of gender (e.g. normative/conformist and non-normative/nonconformists) wherein Arjie questions gender normalcy and his assigned role as a “boy” in the outer sphere. After this initial gender displacement, Arjie is barred from watching his Amma dress. With these examples in mind, Arjie’s memory of modern sexuality in Sri Lanka is a form restraint that muted his desires and expressions. His sexual orientation, class, and gender—alongside the novel’s heteronormative yet politically divided setting—emphasize the ways in which “the personal is the political in this novel” (Jayasuriya 2012, 100).

Arjie’s postcolonial memory recreates Sri Lanka as a queer nation state at war with notions of modernity. In other words, Arjie’s memory of Sri Lanka illustrates a transforming nation in a state of perpetual ruin and loss. Jeganathan argues that the “massive Tamil violence of 1983 produced a profound rupture in the narration of Sri Lanka’s modernity” (Jeganathan 2001, 41). In *Funny Boy*, modernity ruptures in two ways. First, there is social and political rupture leading to civil war. Second, there is rupture in Arjie’s identity, that is, in his inability to reconcile his queer self with the roles that society prescribes him, which precludes Arjie from identifying with a social group and from being completely accepted by his family. This dual ruptured sense of

modernity is at work throughout Selvadurai's novel, and it is through the memory of a ruptured past that Arjie revisits his childhood and eventual exile to Canada. He pieces together fragments of Sri Lankan civil unrest and himself, consequently giving life to a fragmented modernity that first exists in Arjie's memory.

Arjie remembers his home as a conventionally domestic space where roles are assigned, desires are restrained, and behaviors are policed. For instance, when Arjie showcases signs of deviance and protests against the rules that govern his domestic space, the language of authority, his mother's word, shuts him down.

'Why can't I play with the girls?' I replied. 'You can't, that's all'. But why?' She shifted uneasily. 'You're a big boy now. And big boys must play with other boys' 'That's stupid.' 'It does not matter,' she said, 'the world is full of stupid things and sometimes we just have to do them. (Selvadurai 1994, 20)

Arjie's dialogue with his Amma demonstrates the novel's two competing gender discourses, conformity and non-conformity. Gopinath argues that the dialectic of "gender conformity and non-conformity are narrativized through competing discourses in the story, where the rhetoric of non-conformity as perversion is undercut by the anti-normative performance of gender in 'Bride-Bride'" (Gopinath 2005, 172). Because Arjie's home is

a heteronormative domestic space, his “anti-normative performance of gender” is often met with authoritative definitiveness, like “the world is full of stupid things” and “because pigs can’t fly” (Selvadurai 1994, 20). Unlike Arjie’s home, Shehan Soyza’s home complicates the home as metaphor for nationality and gender norms. Shehan is a Sinhalese boy from Queen Victoria Academy, who Arjie is attracted to throughout the novel. It is within Shehan’s non-normative home that the boys are granted and agency. Shehan’s home is an anti-modern space that more accurately mirrors the fragmentation, paradoxical mesh, and postcolonial state of Sri Lanka. Thus, it is only within a state of ruin and transformation where the boys freely express their queer desires. Arjie’s constant battle with his own identity is mirrored in the novel’s chaotic state of warfare, a larger societal postcolonial environment that reveals a non-normative nation state, that is, a chaotic state of warfare, violence, and social divide that one may call a queer Nationalism.

## **Queer Spaces as Queer Nationalism**

Because of their non-normative desires, Arjie and Shehan are the novel’s most visibly queer figures. They suffer similar psychological and physical violence oftentimes by the same castigators. Yet their domestic space is vastly different. In the chapter section entitled “The Best of Them All,” Arjie is invited to Shehan’s home. Here, the condition and physical appearance of Shehan’s home reveals

to Arjie that Shehan's mother is absent. Arjie observes:

The inside of the house was in a poor state. The red floor had not been stained for so long that the gray of the cements showed through. The upholstery on the settees was faded, and the wooded arms of the chairs were unvarnished. As I glanced around me, I somehow knew that Shehan didn't have a mother. (Selvadurai 1994, 246; emphasis mine)

This scene exhibits intersections between queer desire, architectural decay, and the mother's place within a modern domestic space, all of which take place in Shehan's bedroom as the boys shamefully discuss Shehan's mother's divorce, the condition of the house, and the remnants of Englishness that seem to persist in the boys' personal and public lives. The decaying state of the house in this scene mirrors a decaying and divided Sri Lanka and the non-normative nature of a divided nation state.

Shehan's house is a symbol for anti-modernity. It is an allegory for lack of unity between Tamil and Sinhalese, the collapsing state of Sri Lanka, and a representation of an attack on the modern state. In this sense, Shehan's home is a space that does not represent material nor political progress. Recalling Gopinath here, the years contextualizing *Funny Boy's* political and cultural memory of violence accentuate Tamil and Sinhalese

combatant discourses for prospective modernity. According to Jeganathan, “literature positions violence as a fury or an eruption, always uncontrolled and unthought . . . explosions [that] are then juxtaposed to restraint or peace; the supposed state or ordinary life in Sinhala society” (Jeganathan 2001, 44). In other words, “violence as a fury or an eruption” *destructures* and unsettles “a state or ordinary life” (Jeganathan 2001, 44). The decay and ruin in Shehan’s home parallels the violence in Sri Lanka’s civil conflict. Thus, both violence and decay are anti-modern because they unsettle an already established order and progress which underline a loss of modernity (i.e., a loss of materiality, progress, civil obedience).

Unshaped by decay and ruin as violence, Shehan’s domestic space also represents the crumbling golden years of the English colonial era (i.e., English modernity) and foreshadows the Sri Lankan Civil War<sup>1</sup>. With that said, Shehan as a queer figure occupies a queer postcolonial space, or, as Gopinath says, a space between an inner “atavistic space of spirituality and tradition” and “the outer male sphere of progress politics, materiality, and modernity” (Gopinath 2005, 171). In addition to seeing a non-normative space with the remnants of an imperial power, in Shehan’s motherless home, Arjie also sees “the potential for the free play of fantasy” (Selvadurai 4). Unlike Arjie’s home—where queer expression and desire are not permitted—Shehan’s queer space licenses queer expression in part because it lacks

the structure which often polices and orients gender behavior via “inner” and “outer” polarizing categories.

Shehan’s queer domestic space is full of the remnants of colonial society, with “furniture old and heavy that belonged to another era” (Selvadurai 1994, 246). The society decaying within the walls of Shehan’s queer domestic space is far from Romantic, however. The “old and heavy furnisher” belongs the British colonial era, when Sri Lanka was known as Ceylon. Shehan’s house portrays physical remnants of Ceylon not merely in the furnishings of the house but also through the absence of Shehan’s mother. For instance, in Shehan’s bedroom, Arjie asks, “where is your mother?” Shehan replies that his “parents are separated and that [his] mother lives in England with her new husband” (Selvadurai 1994, 247). Arjie’s curiosity and questions disrupt the eroticism of this scene and “disappoints” Shehan who expected more from Arjie. In Arjie’s memory, Shehan’s queer home is central for understanding Arjie’s queer desires and Sri Lanka’s state of warfare, which are in a constant state of respective sexual and political transformation. In this sense, the dissonances between and among these positionalities are non-identifiable, uncertain, and unfixed “meshes” (as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick might call them): viz., the house is in slow decay; Sri Lanka is in a state of warfare, and Shehan and Arjie are desperately trying to “hook-up” for the first time amidst all this uncertainty and de-structuralization of sovereignty (Selvadurai 1994, 222)<sup>2</sup>.



*Funny Boy's* romance plot relies on the boys' queer love and desire as much as it does on their shared suffering and restraint. It is within Queen Victoria Academy that Shehan and Arjie react against gender conformity by displaying, what Gopinath calls, an "anti-normative performance of gender" (Gopinath 2005, 172). Queen Victoria Academy is the site for Arjie's sexual awakening. Arjie's Appa enrolls him Queen Victoria Academy because he believes that the school "will force [Arjie] to become a man," that is, to become a heteronormative boy who is not "funny" (Selvadurai 1994, 210). Ironically, however, the school brings Arjie closer to Shehan, who stands out in the backdrop of the Victoria Academy's heteronormative setting. Arjie remembers first meeting Shehan and describes him as:

... having a certain power which gave him immunity from bullies like Salgado. Where it comes from I didn't understand. It was certainly not his physical strength. His long eyelashes and prominent cheekbones gave his face a fragility that looked like it could easily shatter. Yet there was a confidence about him an understanding of his own power. (Selvadurai 1994, 212)<sup>3</sup>

Bullies like Salgado and Black Tie fetishize queerness in the novel, which in a sense explains where Shehan's power and confidence "comes from" (Selvadurai 1994, 212). For Arjie, however, Shehan's power and confidence are complicated by his own restrained and queer

desires. Arjie is no-doubt attracted to Shehan's ability to be queer with impunity. Arjie notices, "he was daring, for unlike the other boys, he wore his hair long" (Selvadurai 1994, 218). Even though Arjie is in the grip of heteronormative restraint, Shehan's "anti-normative performance of gender" allows Arjie to break away from Black Tie's genderizing structures (Gopinath 2005, 172).

The Queen Victoria Academy represents a homosocial hierarchy where Black Tie is at the top, the prefects in the middle, and "gang leaders" like Salgado and Cheliah are at the bottom. Arjie recalls a scene where he witnesses Cheliah being beaten and sexually assaulted by Salgado and his boys. As Cheliah uses the urinal, Salgado's gang questions and then "grabbed him from behind . . . kicked open the cubicle and the boys crowed inside, dragging Cheliah with them" (Selvadurai 1994, 213). Arjie speeds out of the bathroom to the hallway where he runs into Shehan who then explains to Arjie's the politics of what he witnessed in the bathroom. Shehan claims, "'Cheliah is the leader of the Grade 9 Tamil class' . . . 'So, it's a Sinhala-Tamil thing'" Arjie replies (Selvadurai 1994, 214). As Shehan details the complexity of the "Sinhala-Tamil thing," the Victoria Academy's social hierarchy becomes clearer to Arjie. As it turns out, "Salgado and others like him are in high favor with Lokubandara [and] can do whatever they like" (Selvadurai 1994, 214). Very much like the state of Sri Lanka, the school as Shehan points out is divided in two factions:

“supporters of Black Tie and supporters of Lokubandara” (215). On the one hand, Black Tie represents a Tamilian establishment while Lokubandara, on the other hand, represents an emerging Sinhalese nationalism. In both of these factions, masculinity holds a generative responsibility in shaping gender conformity and violence.

In the Victoria Academy, masculinity is measured by the amount of violence the students can both inflict on others and withstand from Black Tie. The tense battle for authority in Victoria Academy, as Gopinath has argued about the domestic space, is the site of “homoeerotic desire and cross-gender identification and pleasure, of intense gender conformity and horrific violence” (Gopinath 2005, 155)<sup>4</sup>. The student body is in agreement that pain and violence are part of manhood and masculinity. Diggy tells Arjie on their first day of school about a number of boys who were “disciplined” by Black Tie: “he began to detail punishments one received for getting on [Black Tie’s] bad side. Once he slapped a boy and broke some of his teeth. Another boy in my class got caned so severely his trousers tore. Then he made him kneel in the sun until he fainted” (Selvadurai 1994, 206). When Arjie asks how the boys retaliated to Black Tie’s punishments, Diggy cautions him and says, “Never complain” (Selvadurai 1994, 206). In other words, “once you come to Victoria Academy you are a man. Either you take it like a man or the other boys will look down on you” (Selvadurai 1994, 207). The language of

“taking it like a man” is ambiguously queer. It implies withstanding *penetrating* violence, restraint, and pain (e.g. masochism) as well as being mindlessly subservient to authorities. As headmaster, Black Tie’s disciplining technique are somewhat sadistic. As Victoria Academy’s most markedly queer figure, Shehan is disciplined more than the other boys. Black Tie tends to call on him to his office more frequently and publicly punishes him in part because of their ethnic differences (i.e., Shehan is Sinhalese and Black Tie, Tamil). In this sense, what motivates Black Tie’s hatred toward Shehan is comparable to what generates the Tamil-Sinhalese conflict, a battle for authority. For Black Tie, Shehan represents the threat of institutional and national reorganization, the loss of authority and the enactment of Lokubandara’s vision for the school: “a Buddhist school” and a nation with “no place for Tamils in it” (Selvadurai 1994, 215)<sup>5</sup>.

It is not incidental or arbitrary that out of the eight parts of Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy*, only the final chapter section, “Riot Journal: An Epilogue,” is dated. “July 25, 1983” is paramount to the history of Selvadurai’s Sri Lanka, that year being one of Sri Lanka’s most politically and physically violent ones, and that month, “July,” the pinnacle of all of the Tamil-Sinhalese violence. This tumultuous moment is usually referred to as Black July or the anti-Tamil pogrom, a mass scale riot beginning on July 24, 1983 and lasting about seven days where numerous anti-Tamil Sinhalese burned, looted, and destroyed proper-

ty, killing over two thousand Tamilsan citizens (Thiranagama 2011, 77). *Funny Boy's* treatment of the anti-Tamil riots has been a topic of interest for literary critics like Maryse Jayasuriya and Gayatri Gopinath who write about Arjie's subjectivity and Sri Lankan civil conflicts. On the one hand, Jayasuriya's book length study of Sri Lankan Anglophone literatures, *Terror and Reconciliation: Sri Lankan Anglophone Literature (1983-2009)* provides a historiographical reading of *Funny Boy* in light of Sri Lankan fiction. Jayasuriya claims that *Funny Boy* highlights the necessity of bearing "witness—to both the communalism that leads to ethnic tensions and violence, and other types of oppression relating to ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation" (Jayasuriya 2012, 100). As Arjie's queer body becomes the site of violence in the novel, so does the nation state of Sri Lanka. On the other hand, Gopinath characterizes the queer diasporic body as a "medium through which home is remapped and its various narratives are displaced, uprooted, and infused with alternative forms of desire" (Gopinath 2005, 165). Gopinath maps a relationship between Arjie's desires and his family's migration through a coming-out narrative about exile. She argues that *Funny Boy* "rearticulates the very notions of exile and sexual subjectivity" (Gopinath 2005, 166). In other words, the visible oppression toward the Tamil people and consequent exile of thousands of Tamils, may be respectively mapped on to Arjie's restrained sexuality (punishment from relatives, prefects, and peers) and his coming out story<sup>6</sup>.

Pradeep Jeganathan argues that violence is a new focus in Sri Lankan anthropology, only seriously considered post 1983, that has since ruptured the narration of Sri Lanka's modernity (Jeganathan 2001, 41). The events of 1983 became "the historical and conceptual condition of possibility for anthropological violence" (Jeganathan 2001, 41)<sup>7</sup>. In Selvadurai's novel, the rupture of violence may be categorized as physical and psychological. For instance, Arjie recalls Black Tie's disciplinary beatings, the murders of his grandparents, Ammachi and Appachi, and the mysterious death of Daryl Uncle. He also remembers the destruction of property in Colombo, the burning of Tamilan homes. Arjie likewise recalls psychologically tortuous moments in a postcolonial setting: the memory of Appa's realization and reaction to his son's "funny" behavior, Amma's sexual frustration with Daryl Uncle, and Arjie's separation from Shehan. These nuanced forms of physical and psychological violence are important for Arjie's postcolonial retrospective retelling.

In conclusion, Arjie's coming-of-age narrative is told through a lens of postcolonial memory. This type of looking back displays the ways in which the colonial past still lingers in the cultural and political ethos of the novel's present Sri Lanka. Black Tie, the Victoria Academy, the poems "Vitae Lampada" and "The Best School of Them All" are memorials erected for the past. This nostalgia for a colonial Ceylon is motivated by the ruins of

that very history, Shehan's house and the fears of political and national change. Whether it is the postcolonial nostalgia for a British imperial power and the crumbling symbols of its reign, or Arjie's own traumatic retrospection of Tamil-Sinhalese conflicts and the cultural restraint and policing of his sexuality at home, the postcolonial memory in Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* positions a non-normative state of mind and nation state, queered by the notion of modernity and what it means to be modern.

## Notes:

1. Throughout *Funny Boy*, Arjie illustrates a number of ruined and queered objects worth noting. First, Arjie's home is ultimately queered after it is destroyed and transformed into a ruin: "I stood at the gate, staring at the devastation in front of me. If not for the gate, which was still intact, I would never have been able to say that this had been our house" (Selvadurai 1994, 290).

2. Another example is "Pigs Can't Fly," Arjie claims that "Territorially, the area around my grandparents' house was divided in two. The front garden, the road and the field that lay in front of the house belonged to the boys . . . the second territory was called 'the girls', included in which, however, myself, a boy" (Selvadurai 1994, 3). After his careful description, Arjie admits to being attracted to the "free play" and fantasy "the girls" create (Selvadurai 1994, 3). The last example is a space between modernity and atavistic tradition, a queer space.

3. It is important to note that Shehan's mother is Arjie's mother's doppelganger as both women express interest for other men and are ultimately pushed out of Sri Lanka and end up in the western world, the UK and Canada respectively.

4. One may recall this mysterious "confidence" and "power" in the way Arjie sees Radha Auntie in the chapter section titled "Radha Auntie" who is undisturbed by



or inattentive to Tamil-Sinhalese conflict. Thus, Radha Auntie and Shehan showcase a freedom and confidence that Arjie does not see in other characters.

5. One notable example of the Lokubandara (Sinhala) and Black Tie (Tamil) conflict is the name of the school, “Victory Academy.” For instance, “Lokubandara wanted to change the name of the school, which he felt was too British. The name he had in mind was that of a Buddhist priest who had done much to preserve traditional vernacular” (Selvadurai 1994, 215).

6. Some of Black Tie’s disciplining techniques are homoerotic performances. For instance, when Black Tie notices Shehan’s longer hair, “He pulls his head back so that his face was turned up towards him. [Shehan] Soysa’s eyes were open wide with fright. Then Black Tie raised his hand and slapped him . . . Black Tie pulled him forward. ‘Scallywag, he said “don’t ever think you can get away with this in my school. As long as I am principal, we will have discipline in my school”’ (Selvadurai 1994, 217).

7. For more on Sri Lankan Civil War history, see *The Seasons of Trouble: Life Amid the Ruins of Sri Lanka’s Civil War* (2014) by Rohini Mohan and *In My Mother’s House: Civil War in Sri Lanka (the Ethnography of Political Violence)* (2013) by Sharika Thiranagama.

8. Borrowing from Jonathan Spencer's essay, "Collective Violence and Everyday Practice in Sri Lanka," Jegannathan delineates the anthropological body of Sri Lankan violence, which Spencer claims is rarely practiced regardless of how often it is paired with Sri Lankan history. Spencer explains, "the relative invisibility of violence in day to day life can be linked to the strong emphasis on restrained village social life" (606).

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*Nina Almayer, Aurora Marion and 'The Cultural Air We Breathe': Character Status and Embodiment in Joseph Conrad's Almayer's Folly and its Film Adaptation as Chantal Akerman's La Folie Almayer.*

Alice M. Kelly

**Introduction**

In his introduction to the fourth Norton Critical Edition of *Heart of Darkness*, Paul Armstrong argues that the text has 'become part of the cultural air we breathe' (Armstrong, 2006, ix). If Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* has been memorialised as a ubiquitous marker of late nineteenth century imperialist literature, so pervasively influential that its consumption and routes of reception have become inevitable and unquestioned, as Armstrong suggests, it is also specific bodies posited in terms of gender and colour that have been made visible

as the expected inhabitants of cultural history. The canonized avatar of Conrad happens to be one whose work is exclusively populated by angst-ridden, ambivalent European male colonial agents wringing their hands about Empire and masculinity, so that it is the experiences of straight white men that are given space and capital in the cultural archive.

When Terry Collits, musing on his attempts to understand the "elusive lost object we know as 'Conrad'", describes him as "a writer who found language a frustratingly inadequate means of penetrating the unknowableness of a Kurtz, a Jim, or a Heyst" (Collits, 2005, 19-20), he very casually evokes a Conrad canon populated exclusively by white men. Kurtz of *Heart of Darkness*, Jim of *Lord Jim* and Heyst of *Victory* are so evidently characterful, so acutely drawn and thoroughly rendered, in Collits' view, that they become synonymous with the type of human experience Conrad was trying to articulate. Collits constructs a corpus of Conradian characters as valuable subjectivities explored in his work (those that would encourage us to grapple with his works today), that are entirely white and male. Moreover, he makes them indefinite, generic - "a Kurtz, a Jim, or a Heyst" - as if they are non-specific, context transcendent inhabitants of the literary canon, rather than gendered constructs occupying scripted colonial roles, whose claims to characterhood are preconditioned on their race and gender. Coming across such a heedless elision of the fe-

male characters in Conrad's work reminds me that Susan Jones' call for "the place of women [to] be recovered from the predominantly masculine tendency of Conrad criticism" (Jones, 2001, 37) is work that is necessarily ongoing. Significantly, Conrad's work is not exclusively populated by white men at all.

In this paper, I begin by turning to his lesser-known first novel, *Almayer's Folly* (1895) to draw attention to the woman of colour at its centre, Nina Almayer, and propose that she is as viable a 'Conradian' protagonist as Kurtz, Jim, or Heyst. Having drawn attention to the feminist, anti-colonial resistance Nina represents in *Almayer's Folly*, I then explore the way she materialises in Chantal Akerman's film adaptation *La Folie Almayer* (2011) where she is repositioned at the centre of the story. I argue that if Nina's extended articulations of her own sense of identity, both sexual and racial, in Conrad's novel offer a breathing space in 'the cultural air we breathe' of the colonial literary canon, then Aurora Marion's portrayal of her in the film adaptation intervenes as a resonant, bold afterlife for Nina that brings her out of Conrad's shadow.

## **Nina Almayer in Conrad's *Almayer's Folly***

Nina's biracial identity is persistently posed as a threat to the other characters in the novel, as she occupies a putatively troubling position between tangible ethnic cat-

egories. When she is sent to Singapore to live with the Vincks, her racial identity is interpreted as dangerous to the white family unit, as Captain Ford, who brings her back to Sambir, tells her father:

...it is deucedly awkward to have a half-caste girl in the house. There's such a lot of fools about. There was that young fellow from the bank who used to ride to the Vinck bungalow early and late. That old woman thought it was for that Emma of hers. When she found out what he wanted exactly, there was a row, I can tell you. [ . . . ] What can you do? It is better so. Let her stay with you. She was never happy over there. Those two Vinck girls are no better than dressed-up monkeys. They slighted her. You can't make her white. (Conrad, 1978, 28)

Her 'half-caste' status makes her a disruptive presence that the white family cannot accommodate, particularly when she is perceived as more attractive than the white Vinck girls. Nina is blamed for attracting the attentions of the many 'fools about' generally, and "that young fellow from the bank" in particular. Her skin colour is read as a sign of promiscuity, made to bear the weight of inappropriate male desire; Nina is punished by Mrs Vinck, here, because she can be punished. Her treatment at the hands of the Vincks speaks to who can be spoken to and who can be held accountable for the vices of white men in colonial culture. Her body, which cannot be made white, is appointed the natural bearer of sin, and the



site upon which miscegenation ought to be policed, in a move that also reiterates its non-whiteness. The banker, as an upstanding member of colonial society, cannot be admonished, in case he can still be persuaded to marry one of the Vinck girls. Nina's exclusion points to the imperial power dynamics that Ann Stoler describes, in which "social and legal standing derived not only from colour, but from the silences, acknowledgments, and denials of the social circumstances in which one's parents had sex" (Stoler, 1989, 635). In Singapore, a space she inhabits in order to be made white, a whitening space, Nina and her path through the world are entirely defined by her interracial parentage, which cannot be white-washed.

However, there is a suggestion in Ford's resignation and renunciation of Nina's whiteness that the whole experience has further demarcated her troublingly ambiguous outsider status. In differentiating her from the Vinck girls, in insisting that she cannot be made white, Ford's colonial rhetoric slips, attaching itself to "Those two Vinck girls [who] are no better than dressed-up monkeys". Ford suggests that next to Nina, the white female bodies around her also fail to be 'made white', their civilised European colonial citizenship looking more affected than Nina's. Her non-whiteness is experienced by colonial culture as a worrying contagion. In the image of Nina, who cannot be made white, moving through the whitening space of Singapore, whiteness as a natu-

ral, neutral, invisible identity category becomes glaringly unstable and suddenly alarmingly unattainable for everyone.

While Nina is not white enough for European colonial culture in Singapore, she is presented as far too white for some of the Malay characters in *Sambir*. Babalatchi, the Rajah of *Sambir*'s "prime minister, harbour master, financial adviser, and general factotum" (Conrad, 1978, 34) relays to his master, Lakamba, the secret details of Mrs Almayer's plot to fake Dain's death. When he describes Nina's involvement in hiding Dain from the Dutch colonial forces, the threat posed by "the white side of her descent" (Conrad, 1978, 38) is at the forefront of his storytelling:

'And where did you say he [Dain] is hiding now?' asked Lakamba, breaking at last the silence full of gloomy forebodings in which they both had been lost for a long while.

'In Bulangi's clearing – the furthest one, away from the house. They went there that very night. The white man's daughter [Nina] took him there. She told me so herself, speaking to me openly, for she is half white and has no decency. She said she was waiting for him while he was here; then, after a long time, he came out of the darkness and fell at her feet exhausted. He lay like one dead, but she brought him back to life in her arms, and made him breathe again with her own breath. That is what she said, speaking to my face, as

I am speaking now to you, Rajah. She is like a white woman and knows no shame.' (Conrad, 1978, 104)

Babalatchi interprets Nina's willingness to speak directly to him, about physical, illicit contact with a man, as an evocation of her whiteness. Nina's voice and unapologetic sexuality mark her as white and shameless to Babalatchi and Lakamba. Again, she is made to bear the mark of sexual indiscretion, as she does in Singapore, because she is out of step with the customs of the Islamic culture in which she finds herself. Not white enough for white society, too white for Sambir, she is perceived by others to be somewhere in-between these worlds and this makes her dangerous.

When Lakamba and Babalatchi try to think of ways to untangle themselves from association with the fugitive Dain, who is being hunted by the Dutch (the Orang Blanda), Nina's race proves a problem for them:

'He must not fall into the hands of the Orang Blanda,' said Lakamba; 'but let him die, if the thing can be done quietly.'

'It cannot, Tuan! Remember there is that woman who, being half white, is ungovernable, and would raise a great outcry.' (Conrad, 1978, 105)

Later, Babalatchi privately dwells on the problem Nina poses: "And there was that half-white woman with threatening eyes. How could he tell what an incompre-

hensible creature of that sort would or would not do? She knew so much that she made the killing of Dain an impossibility" (Conrad, 1978, 108). While Babalatchi clearly experiences Nina's social and sexual confidence as a symptom of her white shamelessness, it is the *half* of her 'half-white' status that makes her 'ungovernable' and 'incomprehensible.' It is not that Babalatchi and Lakamba fear her because of her white heritage, because in the same breath they are plotting to deceive the Dutch colonial authorities who have considerably more muscle, as well as actual fire-power, at their disposal. She threatens them because her racial identity makes her an unpredictable subject who defies categorisation.

Amidst this context of overdetermination, in which her identity is signified by the people around her in terms of internecine cultural warfare, Nina manages to choose her own path with grace and dignity. At the end of the text she is afforded the space to respond to the discrimination she has suffered. When her father learns of her intentions to flee Sambir to live as Dain's wife, he confronts her with those same ideas of imperial hierarchies that led him to send her to the Vincks in the first place: "“tell me, what have they done to you, your mother and that man? What made you give yourself up to that savage? For he is a savage. Between him and you there is a barrier that nothing can remove. I can see in your eyes the look of those who commit suicide when they are mad”" (Conrad, 1978, 144). Almayer sees Nina's desire

for Dain as a destructive delusion that will bring about social death. He goes on to appeal to her memory of her time in white society, asking “‘Have you forgotten the teaching of so many years?’” (Conrad, 1978, 144). Nina’s response forms a cutting indictment of colonial culture that is far more compelling than Almayer’s whining: “‘No,” she interrupted, “I remember it well. I remember how it ended also. Scorn for scorn, contempt for contempt, hate for hate. I am not of your race. Between your people and me there is also a barrier that nothing can remove. You ask why I want to go, and I ask you why I should stay’” (Conrad, 1978, 144). Nina is more articulate than any of the men around her, piercing her father’s lexicon of white supremacy to highlight the duplicities and cruelties in his treatment of her.

She is clear, concise and scathing of the violent patriarchal colonial codes by which he has forced her to live:

You wanted me to dream your dreams, to see your own visions – the visions of life amongst the white faces of those who cast me out from their midst in angry contempt. But while you spoke I listened to the voice of my own self; then this man came, and all was still; there was only the murmur of his love. You call him a savage! What do you call my mother, your wife? (Conrad, 1978, 145)

Eloquently owning her desires, Nina positions Dain’s love as the antidote to the anger and racial hatred she

has experienced all her life. She is afforded the textual breathing space to counter Ford's version of events in which "it is deucedly awkward to have a half-caste girl in the house", so that we learn that it was more than 'deucedly awkward' to be 'a half-caste girl' in that house. Most striking is her vehement, acerbic emphasis on Almayer's hypocrisy, which also functions as a sharp defence of Dain, her mother and her own Malay heritage. Her devotion to Dain functions as a declaration of a cultural identity she chooses for herself: "And I mean to live. I mean to follow him. I have been rejected with scorn by the white people, and now I am a Malay!" (Conrad, 1978, 145). Nina frames her choice to be with Dain as a choice to be Malay, a choice to not be white; these are choices that animate her, that make her feel alive. And yet the choice is one of purity in identity, it performs a non-reluctant relinquishing of her in-betweenness.

The space Nina's voice takes up in the text is substantial, and her critique of her father and the colonial culture to which he aspires, and in which she has suffered, is sustained throughout. In a further confrontation with Almayer, as she proceeds to leave Sambir, she reiterates the importance of her own agency when he tries to defend the choice he has made for her:

"I wanted to give you years of happiness for the short day of your suffering. I only knew of one way." "Ah! but it was not my way!" she replied' (Conrad, 1978, 154).

Nina, who listens "to the voice of [her] own self", and chooses not to be white, who wants to "live [her] own life as [her father has] lived [his]" (Conrad, 1978, 154), speaks to him with clarity and candour again here. The courage and care of these words, in the face of her father's obstinate refusal to listen to her, might recall a familiar scene for many women who have found their choices repeatedly interrogated and dismissed. She stands up to a person who loves her and wants what he thinks is best for her, and speaks with compassion, in the face of a history of his coercion, to say "your path is not my path". She is staking her claim to a course of her own.

Finally, Nina articulates her own feelings about being stranded between the two cultural worlds that have been fighting over her identity and ostracising her as a threat:

Between you and my mother there never was any love. When I returned to Sambir I found the place which I thought would be a peaceful refuge for my heart, filled with weariness and hatred – and mutual contempt. I have listened to your voice and to her voice. Then I saw that you could not understand me; for was I not part of that woman? Of her who was the regret and shame of your life? I had to choose – I hesitated. Why were you so blind? Did you not see me struggling before your eyes? But, when he [Dain] came, all doubt disappeared, and I saw only the light of the blue and cloudless heaven [. . .] (Conrad, 1978, 155)

Nina posits her ability to make her own sexual choices as the antithesis to the racialized, gendered life she has lived. She embraces a 'blue and cloudless' future with Dain- though this future seems too pure, too alarmingly innocent a blueprint and too much a refuge-seeker in the love of a man, because it is what she wants, of that she is clear. She acknowledges, though, the influence of her mother's voice, as well as the impact of her father's treatment of her mother. Nina shames her father into accepting his responsibilities as the parent of a biracial child. She holds him accountable for his sexual decisions, for the "regret and shame of [his] life", turning the tables on the colonial culture that blamed her for the indiscretions of "that young fellow from the bank", so that it is ultimately the white man, rather than the woman of colour, who is castigated for considering miscegenation an erasable sin at the climax of this novel.

To find this kind of resonant anti-colonial critique – powerful, piercing, delivered by a mixed-race young woman – in the depths of the colonial canon, reminds us that when we decide to record European cultural history through the work of dead white men, and when we make a further choice to remember that work as being populated by dying white men ('a Kurtz, a Jim, or a Heyst' (Collits, 2005, 20)), we are also making a choice to forget characters like Nina, who are not dead, not white, not male. Nina emerges from within the colonial literary canon to renounce the hierarchies and radical expulsions



by which such racialized cultural distinctions have been built.

### **Aurora Marion as Nina in Akerman's *La Folie Almayer***

Chantal Akerman's *La Folie Almayer* (2011) offers Nina an afterlife, memorialising Conrad's novel through her character development beyond the text of the novel. Through the film, she materialises on screen as the centre of the narrative, from the disturbing, beguiling prologue to the protracted sequence detailing her 'backstory' mid-way through the film. Her colonial education is made much more explicit here; instead of the Vinck household of the book, she is sent to a boarding school, which, as Marion Schmid highlights, is repeatedly figured as her prison (Schmid, 2014, 27). Schmid describes the opening of the film – in which the 'blue and cloudless heaven' of Nina and Dain's future is translated on screen as a dark, neon-lit nightclub where we find Nina dancing trancelike behind a (badly) crooning Dain – as 'a radical departure from the novel': 'the adaptation, in a more cynical take, has her end up, in the director's own words, as "une danseuse parmi d'autres, peut-être droguée, hallucinée, dans une sorte de bordel" [a dancer among others, perhaps drugged, hallucinating, in a kind of brothel]' (Schmid, 2014, 26). *La Folie Almayer* does not follow a linear narrative strategy, beginning at the end – with Akerman imagining Nina and Dain's life together – and fragment-

ed throughout with scenes that could feasibly take place at any time after Nina's return to Sambir. Within this fractured composition, Nina's story is arguably the most conventionally structured as it adheres to the timeline of her schooling and subsequent expulsion.

Nina's dominance in Akerman's adaptation testifies to her power within the original text, as she is staged on screen as a character in whom we should invest. As Rita Felski writes, this is the kind of significance that is normatively reserved for straight white male characters: "we are accustomed to finding broader resonances in male bodies, glimpsing the sublime in the stories of heroic struggle and drawing existential metaphors out of images of male solitude. We are less used to endowing female bodies with this kind of authority and reading female lives as rich in general resonances" (Felski, 2003, 17). Felski reminds us why it is so important to find the character of Nina at the centre of Akerman's adaptation, moving through the work as its protagonist, a body endowed with narratorial authority by the fixed gaze of the camera. Indeed because as Brain Farlane puts it, "*Film [ . . . ] is always happening in the present tense*" (Mc Farlane, 2007, 21, emphasis original). She is literally made present, appearing before us with a life of her own, that is not defined by the dead white man who first created her.

Aurora Marion's contribution to Nina's embodiment (making her matter) has not received the credit it de-

serves. There is a sexualizing and exoticizing undercurrent to the descriptions of her in reviews of the film which place value on her appearance rather than her craft. Nicholas Rapold calls her ‘frustratingly stiff’ (Rapold, 2012, par. 7) in his neo-colonially titled *New York Times Review*, “‘Trapped in a Jungle and a State of Mind’”. His only praise for Marion is based on her appearance, and even this is framed negatively, as he argues that “the vibrant beauty of Nina (the new face Aurora Marion) seems almost an affront” (Rapold, 2012, par. 6). Marion’s contribution to the film is measured in terms of her desirability, which is in turn categorized as troubling. She is to Rapold the personification of what Laura Mulvey famously termed ‘*to-be-looked-at-ness*’ (Mulvey, 1975, 11, emphasis original). There is no indication in his review of what Marion is doing as Nina, or even of Nina as a role that requires the *doing* of performance.

The language Michael Atkinson employs in his review of the DVD release of *La Folie Almayer* in the December 2016 issue of *Sight and Sound* is even more demeaning to both Marion and the character of Nina. He writes of “‘the film’s payload of South-East Asia exotica, its superbly crafted old-school melodrama complete with a ravishing half-blood temptress (Belgian-Greek-Rwandan beauty Aurora Marion)’” (Atkinson, 2016, 96). Nina is erased, as is Marion’s effort to embody her as a character separate from herself as Atkinson effectively labels Marion ‘a ravishing half-blood temptress’. Aside from

the inaccuracy of Atkinson's writing, as neither Conrad nor Akerman ever position Nina as anyone's 'temptress', Atkinson's focus on Marion's personal heritage makes his use of 'half-blood' particularly offensive. There is something about the world of Conrad, or 'the bush of Conradistan' (Atkinson, 2016, 96) as Atkinson calls it, that allows the lexicon of colonialism to creep into public discourse, that apparently makes it socially permissible to describe Aurora Marion as a 'Belgian-Greek-Rwandan beauty', rather than an actor, or to call her 'half-blood' or 'temptress'. This is an example of how insidiously a 'Conradian' vocabulary empowers certain bodies to speak while excluding others from cultural production. According to Atkinson, Aurora Marion does not take up space in the film, in the canon of Akerman's work, in the canon of Conrad adaptations, or in 'Conradistan' as a maker of meaning, but as an Other.

In leering tones, he recounts Nina's return to Sambir as an adult as "'fierce, hateful and full-bodied'" (Atkinson, 2016, 96). This reference to the difference between the child actor playing Nina when she is taken from Sambir and Aurora Marion playing her when she returns, suggests (cynically and sinisterly) the ogle-able *full body* of a woman, versus that of a young girl. That Nina's emotional characteristics as 'fierce, hateful', denoting Marion's expression of Nina's internal state, are conflated with her 'full body', is a further example of the way her performance is repeatedly read in terms of her

appearance and sexual attractiveness. Atkinson's use of 'full-bodied' functions as another political marker keeping Marion outside the scope of cultural production, a reminder that what she expresses as Nina will not be valued under the male gaze as anything more than being present as a permissible erotic object.

But in another way Marion's 'full-bodied' Nina is exactly what makes the film such a productive feminist adaptation. Nina's presentation in the film does "connote to-be-looked-at-ness", but as a resonant body that fills the screen, occupying the attention of the audience and conveying a "stor[y] of heroic struggle and [. . .] existential metaphors" (Felski, 2003,17) of pain, despair and isolation, just as Felski has described. The way Marion's embodiment of Nina has been marginalised in reviews of the film points to the roles women of colour are allowed to occupy in "the cultural air we breathe", and the cultural capital denied to certain bodies as the colonial archive is recirculated.

Marion's testimony of her own connection to the source text reads as a breathing space in its own right from the cultural air the *New York Times* and the *Sight and Sound* reviews prescribe. When I asked about her first impressions of the story, Marion recalled that

It felt so close to me. So close to my mother's story.  
Her story that I carry in me. [. . .] My mother was

one of the first half cast child[ren] that was made out of love and not rape. Her mother is Rwandan and her father was Belgian. She was born in 1949 in central Africa when mixed race couples were forbidden. When she was about to be five years old her parents looked for a school. She wasn't accepted anywhere. Nor in White catholic school nor in schools for black people as she was neither [. . .]. So her parents sent her to Belgium to her father's village where she would be somehow accepted bearing her Belgian father's name, but still neither black or white. She was only five years old when she was sent somewhere far away from anything she knew so far. Like Nina was. Nina is my mother, my mother that carries her own story as she carried me. ('Interview with Aurora Marion', 3)

So her parents sent her to Belgium to her father's village where she would be somehow accepted bearing her Belgian father's name, but still neither black or white. She was only five years old when she was sent somewhere far away from anything she knew so far. Like Nina was. Nina is my mother, my mother that carries her own story as she carried me. ('Interview with Aurora Marion', 3) Marion articulates the way her own racial identity and family history infused her understanding of the character, while the resonances she brings to her portrayal of Nina highlight the violence behind Atkinson's use of the term 'half-blood'. When we think about the way she describes the role, her performance comes to represent the condensation of the brutal history of oppression and injustice behind such words.

One of the most striking examples of Aurora Marion's performance is a wordless sequence mid-way through the film, at its very centre, that follows Nina as she leaves the boarding school and journeys back to Sambir. We see her exit the school gates, breathe deeply (inhaling a different cultural air to the colonial one that has been smothering her), unclip the tight bun in which her hair is fastened, light a cigarette and begin to walk (Figure 1).



Figure -1: Nina leaving the colonial boarding school

She moves with purpose through Phnom Penh at night, past families, market stalls and neon lights, the camera fixed on her in profile as if we walk alongside her. In the daylight she walks towards us through busy traffic, before stealing an apple from a market stall, relieving herself in an alleyway and scoffing a bowl of soup (Figures 2 and 3). As Marion Schmid writes of these scenes, “the anachronistic presence of modern cars and DVD stores [. . .] not only evinces the director’s lack of interest in the accuracies that would be demanded by a period-style historical reconstruction, but displaces the film’s absolute vantage point into our own present from where Conrad’s investigation of colonialism and its discontents will be revisited” (Schmid 2014, 25). Nina materialises in our own world, populated by real people who barely see her while our gaze remains fixed on her. When a car drives in front of the camera, obscuring Nina from view because she is not the centre of the world she inhabits, we wait for her, peering round the car until she comes back into view because she is the centre of the cinematic world that we are inhabiting. She is present, presented, a presence through Aurora Marion’s ‘full-bodied’ performance. Schmid argues that “Marion’s stubbornly determined gaze and her rigid, almost hieratic bodily posture and swift-paced walk tracked by the camera “speak” the young woman’s isolation in the pulsating Asian metropolis, where, just as in the white boarding school, she remains an outsider” (Schmid, 2014, 28).





Figure 2 - Nina's journey through Phnom Penh



Figure 3 - Nina's journey through Phnom Penh

Nina materialises in our own world, populated by real people who barely see her while our gaze remains fixed on her. When a car drives in front of the camera, obscuring Nina from view because she is not the centre of the world she inhabits, we wait for her, peering round the car until she comes back into view because she is the centre of the cinematic world that we are inhabit-

ing. She is present, presented, a presence through Aurora Marion's 'full-bodied' performance. Schmid argues that "Marion's stubbornly determined gaze and her rigid, almost hieratic bodily posture and swift-paced walk tracked by the camera "speak" the young woman's isolation in the pulsating Asian metropolis, where, just as in the white boarding school, she remains an outsider" (Schmid, 2014, 28). In this sequence, Akerman's camera speaks for Nina, speaks as Nina as an extension of her embodiment; the materiality of her narrative — eating, smoking, urinating — owns the screen. The lack of dialogue throughout this section and the extended focus on Nina's actions encourage us to imbue her movements with meaning, to find resonance in her body. This silence appoints Nina as exactly the sort of Conradian character that Conrad scholarship has so emphatically insisted is white and male ('a Kurtz, a Jim, or a Heyst') (Collits 2005, 20).

The sequence culminates in Captain Tom Li's Cinderella-like discovery of Nina's discarded sandal, before the camera pans across the port to the slumped figure of its owner waiting for passage back to Sambir. She utters her first spoken words in the film, "they kicked me out", as the culmination of the cultural and social exclusion the previous wordless scenes have enacted. Over the course of her boat journey back to Sambir, Marion delivers the monologue of Nina's traumatic colonial education:

They spied on me. At the table. In my bed. My accent, my way of walking. Especially my way of walking. You had to put the heel down first, then the toes. Or the contrary. I could never get used to it. They called me Tomboy, even Savage sometimes. Not a real girl. Real girls aren't like that. Smiling, the head slightly tilted. Not straight, never straight. And never ever look into the eyes. And say yes. Not no. And the blood, when it happened, you had to hide it, not to talk about it. But be proud of it. Rosa rosa rosam, it was useless. And yet, I learned, if I'm the best, I'll manage, I told myself. And I was the best, but for that too they resented me. And there was always that beef with carrots. Beef with brown sauce. Sticky. The smell. Made me retch. *De viris Illustribus Urbis Romae*. The wars of Caesar. The Emperor who, in the end, got killed by the man he loved. I had to learn everything by heart. I didn't want to. Neither the beef, nor the salad with vinaigrette, nor the coffee with boiled milk. Rosa rosa rosam. And our Father who is in Heaven. My father was not in Heaven. He no longer existed. The beef with carrots. Every Thursday. Friday fish. That day I always said I wasn't hungry. But I was hungry. I was starving. I had never enough. All the time. And then I stained my dress. Rosa rosa rosam. And our Father who is in Heaven with the broken windows.

This monologue attests to the way Akerman's adaptation invests in the pockets of information in Conrad's *Almayer's Folly* about Nina's whitening experience in Sin-

gapore. Continuing the themes of the preceding images, there is a further emphasis here on the materiality of Nina's body. The 'full-body' in which Nina is returning, the 'filling out' of that body through puberty, is referenced not in the way Atkinson implies, but in terms of Nina's own experiences of her changing body. When she describes menstruation, she is also articulating and critiquing the attendant contradictions of shame, defilement and eroticism that overwrite this 'filling out' body in patriarchal society. Nina's feelings on her own embodiment are staged throughout the scene as she voices the performativity at stake in appearing as 'a real girl,' something that is also inflected with racial discourses, as her 'failure' to be 'a real girl' means she is branded 'Savage'. The life she describes is one in which colonial and patriarchal codes intersect at the point of her oppression, so that her colonial education in the wars of Caesar and the eighteenth century Latin textbook *De viris Illustribus Urbis Romae* takes the form of a rape, as her body is forced to contort in accommodation of alien entities: "I had to learn everything by heart. I didn't want to. Neither the beef, nor the salad with vinaigrette, nor the coffee with boiled milk". In Aurora Marion's monotone delivery, the mantra of borrowed European Christian teachings becomes a discordant vocabulary of her story of isolation, and the racial and gendered circumscription of her ambitions and talents. Marion's performance makes it clear that this trauma has damaged Nina, but given that this monologue follows the hypnotic sequence of

her animated material exploration of Phnom Penh, to which her renewed smoking is an evident signal, the speech becomes another moment in which the audience is encouraged to find resonance in her body, to piece together a narrative from the broken fragments she offers us (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Aurora Marion delivers Nina's monologue to Yucheng Sun as Captain Tom Li on the return journey to Sambir (*La Folie Almayeur*, 2011)

This sequence in the film provides Nina with more narrative space than any other character, as she recounts the ordeals she has endured at the school in her own voice and provides a relatively straightforward explanation of her trajectory up to this point in the film. That we have already spent considerable time with Nina during the film's mesmeric opening sequence means that these scenes function as the delivery of Nina's backstory, fill-

ing in the blanks and working towards answering the questions posed by the mysterious prologue.

*La Folie Almayer* opens with an extended sequence in which we see the man who will later turn out to be Dain lip-syncing to Dean Martin's Sway, with a group of dead-eyed young women, including Nina, mechanically dancing behind him in what Schmid calls an indictment of "a global entertainment industry which relentlessly reproduces the same simulacra" (Schmid, 2014, 30). When Dain is stabbed and everyone but Nina flees the stage, it becomes clear to viewers familiar with the source text that this scene is an imagined future that Akerman has invented for Nina and Dain. Schmid argues that this vision of Nina's destiny "exceeds by far even the bleakest prophecies for her future in the book" (Schmid 2014, 30). Nina remains alone on stage for almost a minute, as the camera closes in on her, before she starts singing Mozart's *Ave Verum Corpus* directly into the camera; she occupies the screen for a further two minutes, singing the motet to completion. Over the course of the film, it transpires that she learnt the song at boarding school; in one scene, we overhear her trying to sing it at the school, but she is repeatedly castigated by her teachers; in Sambir, she cannot sing more than a few words before her voice fades away.

Schmid interprets Nina's recital of the song at the film's opening as an ambivalent performance that "begs its

own set of questions: will she find her own voice and determine her destiny now that she is free from the double influence of both her father and lover? Can the subaltern speak [. . .] and does she have access to agency outside colonial and male-dominated structures of power?" (Schmid 2014, 26). For Schmid, while Nina's singing may imply the potential for a different future to that of "a dancer in a seedy nightclub-cum-brothel" (Schmid, 2014, 30), it is still emblematic of colonial and patriarchal lexical regimes that dictate who gets to speak and how.

While Nina's singing is not enough in and of itself to challenge Schmid's interpretation of this prologue as 'the bleakest prophesy' of Nina's future, Aurora Marion viewed the singing more positively, as she explains: "I remember Chantal Akerman telling me that when Dain finally dies, Nina is free. She can sing again" ('Interview with Aurora Marion', 4). This hopeful interpretation is evident in Marion's performance, as she sings through a beaming smile that we do not see again for the rest of the film. Nina's smile casts her recital as a reinscription of her colonial education, where she takes the words and culture of her abusers to find her voice on her own terms, a voice that cannot be interrupted by anyone and one that, opening the film, frames the text as a story that starts with and belongs to her. This retooling is repeated in her monologue about the school later on in the film. By beginning the film with a grim vision that is replaced



with the image of Nina's smile, Akerman assures us of Nina's ultimate happiness from the outset. This means that even when her trauma is staged by the camera and script she is not trapped in her victimhood; we know one day she will have reason to smile again. This version of Nina, happy and free, transcends the confines of the main body of the film and of course the narrative, floating through and outside her darkest scenes as a reminder of the future that awaits her. Thus, she materializes in the filmic text as a character that exists beyond the scope of Conrad's reach, with an (after)life of her own.

## Conclusion

Nina's materiality in this film matters; she is made present to its viewers over and over again as a substantial person, 'full-bodied'. In *La Folie Almayer*, Almayer's Folly is immortalised in the body of a young woman coming to grips with the racial and sexual prejudices that shape her path through the world. The film testifies to the power and volume of Nina's voice throughout the original text, so that the colonial literary canon is here populated by and remembered in the form of women of colour. Those bodies of the dying white male (anti-)heroes we have grown so used to finding under the sign of 'Conrad' ('a Kurtz, a Jim, or a Heyst' (Collits 2005, 20)) lose their exclusive authority as resonance-bearers and makers of meaning. The colonial archive, instead, comes to account for different stories from different bodies.

Because of the way Nina is allowed to materialise, and how this reflects her importance in *Almayer's Folly*, *La Folie Almayer* is a crucial text for the future of a feminist, postcolonial Conrad canon, and an exemplary model for how the work of dead white men can be retooled to circulate a more inclusive cultural air.

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*Gazing at the Pinoy Pride's  
Body: Manny Pacquiao's  
Athletic Body as Meta-  
phor-Product of the Na-  
tional/Colonial Imaginary*

Mary Harmony I. Guevarra

**Body as Nation: Pacquiao as Product of  
the National/Colonial Imagination**

Subsisting as a contestable yet distinct agency for discourses on national identification, the body and its continued use as a vehicle for discussing the nation and its consciousness – the individual's relationship/s to the nation, the nation's greater politics in this era of globalization – have brought forward new perspectives and strategies that enhance our ways of examination. The body as operation allows for an examination of the na-

tional identity on a physical and symbolic platform, not only providing a tiered lens for analysis but also ensuring an obvious link between the nation's outside and inside dynamics. However, the body can also be an easy vehicle for exploitation and commodification and overlapping this reality with the discourse on the body as national identity, it paves for new ways of receiving, imagining, and extending the 'nation.' This problematic on national identification is no stranger to the tropes and discourse of postcolonial studies; in fact, its constant questioning is perhaps the very fuel that sustains its production of scholars, hence paving for new or silenced postcolonial issues to emerge. This seeming 'fetishization' on national identity has eventually operated as a lens not only for the individual members of the nation, but even for those outside of it (perhaps in attempts to make sense of this postcolonial nation to their own); although this fixation has overtly produced two gazes, the outside and the inside gazes, the agenda of identifying the nation is shared by both.

Premising on this question of national identity in postcolonial studies, it is likely that critical discussions on the Filipino identity remains (and perhaps will always be) problematic. Among Filipino scholars, what posits as an obvious problematic in this identification is the 'fictive' association to national consciousness, rooted mostly on the illusory agendas of media and capitalism. In their respective critical works, Tolentino, Cañete and

Tadiar have utilized the body as agency for Filipino national identity, and these critics conclude that the ensuing national consciousness produced by the local media (Tolentino 2014, 157 - 186), the male-gearred capitalist industry (Cañete 2014, n.p.), and the Free World fantasy (as coined by Tadiar, pertaining to the false lack of national order in globalization) is an obvious imagination of a Philippine national identity (Tadiar 2004, 25 – 113). The fictive quality in this identification of the Philippine nation echoes Anderson's *imagined communities*, a proposition in which the nation is imagined as finite of its boundaries, sovereign in its articulation, and horizontal in its comradeship (Anderson 2006, 7); however, it is important to note that in this era of Free World fantasy, in which pathways for globalization and transnational cultures must be continuously opened, this national imagination of the Philippines no longer operates on an internal gaze as Anderson's critical work implies. This is largely due to the understanding that the Philippine media and capitalist industries, the local enterprises that posit the nation in this global market, make this participation possible through exportation; to be specific, the exportation of the body. Hence, this gaze on the national body, that is to say the body/ies that imagine/s the Philippine national identity, diverges into an outside and inside gaze; together, they put forward a national imagination that verifies the Philippines as a country liable to participate in the global market, all the while serving the individual interests of the inside and outside gazes.

The popularity and influence of Filipino boxing champion Emmanuel “Manny” Pacquiao posit as a fitting critical model in this argument of body-as-nation, with his athletic build being the most gazed at Filipino body by the local and international public. Throughout his boxing career, Pacquiao’s team was headed by American Coach Frederick “Freddie” Roach and comprised of mostly American and Filipino trainers and advisers (“Team Pacquiao Members” 2010, n.p.) setting the grounds of his fitness routine and boxing techniques as a seeming co-monopolization between the United States and the Philippines. This then locates the proprietors of the inside and outside gazes, and though both gazes identify the boxer Pacquiao as a national symbol, it is important to understand that these two gazes operate on different agendas in the intervention and interpretation of Manny Pacquiao’s body. For the United States, the valor of his body is hinged on its exoticness, for the mysticism of his small yet herculean physique has been of a definite wonder. This mystical element of his built becomes the key marketability of his professional boxer status, drawing in fans and athletic companies to invest in his training and fights in the United States and the Philippines. On the other hand, for the Filipinos, the valor in Pacquiao’s body is hinged on the poetic caliber of his own life story; the hardships and suffering he endured to attain his “Pinoy success story” is personified by his toned built. His strong brown body symbolizes the success of the patronized Filipino aspiration to “make it big” on a



global scale, a discernibly manufactured aspiration that is heavily cultivated in various Philippine institutions such as education, labor, media, etc.; Pacquiao's locally-rooted but internationally-recognized athleticism and athletic build serves as an obvious product of the Philippines' fantasy-production of the national imaginary, a mechanism that illusions his body as a metaphor for national identification. Hence, Pacquiao's body operates as a *product* in this body-as-nation discourse, and this commodifiable assemblage of Pacquiao's physique grounds the construction of the national imagination of the Filipino and Western gazes.

This critical paper discusses how the body of champion boxer Manny Pacquiao serves as a product of the Filipino community's national imagination - a communal imaginary that undergoes habitual conditioning/s in preparation for that moment of absolute alliance, but has recently emerged with injuries and/or alterations that have ruptured this cycle of the nation's imaginary. The three phases in which the boxer's body is situated - training, fighting, and injury - will be the key contextual spaces in the analysis of Pacquiao's body as a mythical product for the West and as a fantasy product of the national imagination for the Filipinos. Furthermore, the critical paper will examine the consequential nature on how this national/colonial imaginary is constructed - how Pacquiao's masculine body as metaphor for the formation of national imagination is a consequence of

(1) his success as a product of the “make it big” agenda of the Philippine economy and (2) the Western gaze’s perpetuation of Pacquiao as a mythical product. This formation and patronage of Pacquiao’s boxing career throughout the years is received and substantiated by two gazes: one by the Filipinos who perceive his muscular body and athletic prowess as an outstanding product of the “Pinoy success story” economic agenda, and the other by the Western fans and athletic companies who inadvertently produce a colonial imagination of the Philippines, thus consequently producing a modern-day exoticization of Southeast Asian knowledge by funding and placing this Filipino-herculean body in an arena to contest with other subaltern bodies.

Professional boxing as grounds to maintain the alliance between colonial United States and former colony Philippines is not incidental in its roots, for it carries with it the historically-seated agenda of indoctrinating Filipinos into the civilized people as imagined by the Americans; being of an American inheritance, the sport symbolized a way to better a Filipino’s life. Hence, one cannot merely claim that Pacquiao’s inclination to the sport was due to its “monopoly of violence” (Cañete 2014, 119) because his undertaking of the sport was driven by the need for income by his family’s lowerclass status, and not purely by sheer interest. In her critical essay “Prizefighting, Masculinity, and the Sporting Life,” Filipino American critic Linda España-Maram examines the boxing cul-

ture among the First Wave of Filipino migrants in Los Angeles, discussing how the masculine spaces cultivated in these makeshift boxing arenas provided solidarity for the migrant workers and allowed them to celebrate male youth culture (which was otherwise suppressed by their mundane day-to-day jobs). As thoroughly discussed in the historical essay, the United States introduced American sports to the Filipinos, which included boxing, as a means to carry out the benevolent assimilation policy (España-Maram 2006, 84), and when the Filipinos “demonstrated exceptional abilities in sports, especially boxing, American trainers and managers went to the islands, taking the most promising athletes to the United States,” thus bridging Filipino and Filipino American experiences (España-Maram 2006, 75). She further discusses how being a Filipino boxer in the United States during this First Wave migration became a status symbol, signifying that they have achieved socioeconomic mobility in the U.S.

Despite the corrupt practices associated with prize-fighting, poor and working-class youths, frequently from ethnic communities, saw boxing as a viable ticket for socioeconomic mobility and celebrity status... For many marginalized, working-class, and poor youths, sports served as a vehicle for advancement. Since its introduction in the United States, boxing aroused working-class passions and remained principally an ethnic enterprise, attracting athletes and patrons largely from marginalized groups and the laboring classes. (España-Maram 2006, 91-92)

Hence, this era of boxing patronage in U.S.-Philippine history enriches the underlying agenda of benevolent assimilation and paves for a more profound alliance of the Philippines with the American sport; the Filipinos continued passion for boxing today (as a professional sport, as a work out method, etc.) reverberates the neo-colonial power of the United States.

With his back story as a provincial poor boy who eventually gained international prominence as a professional boxer, it is no wonder why many Filipinos perceive Pacquiao's athletic fame as one of the most striking Pinoy success story, and this melodramatic narratology in his boxing career further amplifies Pacquiao's influence and demand on the local and global platforms. Filipino sports journalist Recah Trinidad recounts the magnanimity of a Pacquiao homecoming, which has seemingly surpassed the frenzy of other notable Filipino influencers.

There had been record turnouts for luminaries like world flyweight boxing champion Pancho Villa (Francisco Guilledo in real life) in 1925, martyred former senator Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino in 1983, and movie king Fernando Poe Jr. in 2004. But admirers showed up in full force only during the respective funerals of these folk heroes. In Pacquiao's case, chroniclers could no longer measure the crowds during his homecoming. It did rain sporadically in the motorcade prepared by the city government of Manila, but countless fanatics pushed and shoved – old women in tears waited and waited on the side

street way past sunset – for a glimpse of the hero, now a glowing deity on a float... It was not what the economic doctors had prescribed for the impoverished nation. But the expected happened. Pacquiao's victory sent his poor nation tilting in ecstasy. (Recah 2006, 2)

In his critical essay “Man[n]ly Spectacles,” Reuben Ramas Cañete discusses how Pacquiao's status as a father of four, his athletic vigor, and his political and media personas have put forward “a specific representation of Filipino masculinity rooted within a discursive realm of liberal capitalism” (Cañete 2014, 120) that wholly posits Pacquiao as the ‘quintessential’ Filipino man of the Postmodern age. As a former member of the marginalized masses, Pacquiao has fought his way from poverty and flourished in his career as a boxer, businessman, and politician, securing his occupancy on the stage of power in this economy of desire (Cañete 2014, 119). However, Cañete argues of the transnational capitalist undertones of Pacquiao's influence and fame, which posits a problematization of his seat of power in this economy of desire: is he truly the one in charge, or was made to assume he is in charge?

With a suitably aggressive, masculine, but obedient status as a “by-the-rules professional” boxer, Pacquiao's “backstory” and humble but determined attitude functions as an agentic needle in this narrative, one that sews up and seals the complications

of transnational capital, imperial global finance, and neo-colonialism, transforming the “barbaric fighter” into a “civilised” gentleman, commodity fetish, and product endorser. (Cañete 2014, 128)

Perhaps to clarify Cañete’s problematization of the genuity of Pacquiao’s fame and influence in the economy of desire, Neferti Tadiar’s framework of fantasy-production could serve as substantial reasoning to the true reception of Pacquiao’s success among the Filipinos. One of the highlights of Tadiar’s fantasy-production is on the premise of Philippine economic practices that are essentially deemed as fantasies - “abstract forms into which this work becomes subsumed within the world-system of production” (Tadiar 2004, 6) – that create a common imaginary that the nation hinges on and operates upon in order to participate in the transnational era of globalization. The identification of Pacquiao’s rags to riches story as the premier evidence of this Philippine manufactured aspiration is an obvious practice of the country’s fantasy-production, for a national alliance and imaginary was brought forth. Hence, Tadiar’s framework paves for the understanding that this economy of desire that is weaved from Pacquiao’s national and international influence and fame ultimately posits the athlete as the fantasy product of this capital flow.

Bringing together España-Maram’s historical account on the U.S.-Philippines boxing patronage, Cañete’s identifi-

cation of Pacquiao as a “commodity fetish,” and Tadiar’s framework as grounding for Pacquiao as fantasy product of the national imaginary, their critical insights buffer this study’s premise on Pacquiao as a product for the perpetuation of America’s colonial imagination of the Philippines, which consequently serves as an underlying fuel in the Filipinos interpretation of Pacquiao’s fame and influence as proof of a strong national camaraderie.

### **Pre-fight Training and Conditioning: Profiling Pacquiao’s Body and Alliance with Freddie Roach**

Since his knockout win against Mexican boxer Antonio Barrera for the featherweight title back in 2003 (*The Telegraph*, 21 August 2018, n.p.) in which he gained international fame as the first Filipino and Asian to have had three simultaneous boxing titles (Collins 2018, n.p.) and became the only Filipino athlete to be conferred the Congressional Medal of Achievement (Navarro 2003, n.p.). Pacquiao’s body profile and athletic training has been tracked and studied by a myriad of professional (sports scientists and coaches) and amateur (sports enthusiasts and Pacquiao’s fans) boxing analysts, trying their best to decipher the marvel in Pacquiao’s physique that has allowed him to execute such remarkable boxing style. Prior to every fight, anticipation is built through the release of numerous footages of his trainings and various

feature articles that analyze how his training camps are tailored to ensure the signature ‘Pacman’ physique, all the while enhancing his existing fight techniques to secure his opponent’s knock out. While the journey of his athletic build may seem like the conventional story of any athlete who trains (ample strength and conditioning exercises, proper diet, etc.), much of his good built as a boxer is inherently organic; that is, his endowed body composition already makes him a natural athlete. In a published article in the boxing news and commentary website *Bad Left Hook*, an article was released that explained the science behind Manny Pacquiao’s body; originally written as a commentary article by Leandro Solis (who was casually referred to as a ‘scientist,’ given the informal orientation of the website) but was rewritten in the format of a sports article by Scott Christ, it discusses how the mysticism in Pacquiao’s body was rooted in the fact that his bone density is meant for a seven foot man, when Pacquiao is only five foot and five inches tall. Solis grounds his analysis with the fact that in human physiology, “wrist size is positively correlated to skeletal frame, as well as bone density and mineral content, which in short means, bigger wrist equals bigger bones” (Christ 2011, n.p.). After positing the claim, the discussion moves on to the explanation of what it means to have bigger bones, which prove to be revelatory; having bigger bones entails that one’s body structure is heavier and more stable, and is thus less prone to knockouts. Bigger bones also indicate a larger bone marrow that can



produce more red blood cells, and more red blood cells mean more stamina and endurance (Rock 2016, n.pg). Furthermore, he notes that “the bigger the skeleton, the more weight a fighter can put on such skeleton” (Christ 2011, n.p.), which greatly explains Pacquiao’s fluidity to move up weight divisions, allowing him to hold different weight division titles (“World Boxing Organization” 2011, n.p.). Manny Pacquiao’s wrists are eight inches, which are bigger than an average heavyweight boxer’s wrists, and he is only five foot five inches tall; an eight inch wrist usually belongs to a seven foot man, while a man of five foot five inches usually has a six inch wrist (Sparks 2011, n.p.). Hence, Pacquiao is a seven foot, heavyweight boxer trapped in a featherweight boxer’s body.

The remarkably surreal element in Pacquiao’s physique is what precisely posits him as a wonder for the Western audience, and this scientific examination of his body by an American analyst echoes much of how Western scholars and cultural analysts have archived and mythologized the body of martial artist Bruce Lee. In the essay “Brushes with Bruce Lee as Body,” from the collection *Theorizing Bruce Lee*, Paul Bowman discusses the mythical quality attached to Bruce Lee’s career and personal life, emphasizing that his film roles have illusioned him as transcendental and Lee’s mysterious death only heightened his god-like stance (Bowman 2010, 12). Similar to the phantasmic composition of Pacquiao’s body, Bow-

man quotes the wonder of American author David Miller during his first encounter with Lee, in which Miller states that Lee “served to foreshadow, and be a forebear of, the hyper-fitness body culture of the latter portion of our century. Before Lee, none of us had seen anyone with his streamlined, functional, no scrap masculinity. How can anyone look like that?” (Bowman 2010, 14). Bowman later on discusses the “asiaphiliac drive” that is very much evident in Lee’s cultural influence, in which the fetishization of anything Asian in popular culture is justified of its appropriation (Bowman 2010, 18). Interestingly, Pacquiao has overtly announced that he is a big fan of Bruce Lee and that his fighting style was greatly inspired by Lee (often watching his collector’s set of the artist’s films) (Bishop 2011, D1) and this overt connection that the boxer has made with the commodified martial artist has resumed and perpetuated this asiaphilic drive in the 21st century; only this time, it is directed at a Southeast Asian boxer. This is precisely the agenda in the study of Southeast Asian masculinity that Kam Louie points out in his critical essay on Asian Masculinity studies in the West, in which he states,

Thus the paucity of material on masculinities is not just found in South Asia, but also evident in Southeast Asia. It seems researchers tended not to look at the common man, but extraordinary figures, such as idealized classical spiritual man or the violent wrongdoer (particularly those of sexual nature). Up until the 21st century, little was written about ordi-

nary men performing mundane everyday masculinity  
(Louie 2017, 7).

In essence, Louie explains that for the West, what is considered as a 'valid' form of Southeast Asian masculinity is that of a folkloric or mythical figure; hence, the mystical element in Pacquiao's physique fits the exact profile of the West's understanding on what Southeast Asian masculinity must be, and sheds light on the seeming fixation that the West has on the surreal composition of Pacquiao's body.

This phantasmic quality in Pacquiao's athletic composition is what makes him alluring to the international public that such overwhelming speed and strength rests in this Southeast Asian body. It resonates a great symbolic ring because immense power, domination and athleticism are contained within a subalterned form. The specifics of the training and conditioning that Pacquiao subjects himself to prior to every fight amplifies the symbolic structure of his form, signifying how the subalterned community is exploited and contained within a neocolonial footing, all the while being lauded of its strong interiority. The website *Boxing Science* reports that Pacquiao's training camp is not too long (spanning for only eight weeks as opposed to the usual ten weeks that other boxers undergo) but is very heavy and intensive; Freddie Roach prescribes longer, steady runs and more intense sets for strength and conditioning (Wilson n.d., n.p.). Based on the report, Pacquiao has good core

strength, signifying the athlete's strong interiority. Similarly, Filipino psychology places emphasis on the *loob/labas* dichotomy and Pacquiao's 'strong core' can be literally translated to *malakasangloob* or *lakasngloob*, a saying that has a metaphoric understanding in Filipino culture as guts, courage and/or willpower. Hence, as a professional athlete and a Filipino who carries with him the *lakasngloob* conviction, Pacquiao is sure to endure the physical and mental difficulties of his trainings. As a site intended for exercise enthusiasts and scientists, Boxing Science states that Pacquiao's training camp is not advisable for the non-athlete because his training inhibits proper recovery and does not give the body enough time to adapt to the training. Though this training obviously entails that Pacquiao's body is overworked within a short period of time, the extremity of this training technique apparently ensures his optimal endurance; coupling this high endurance exercise with his inherently strong bone density, Pacquiao is sure to last until the twelfth round of his fights, and perhaps even more. Furthermore, this training method sustains the momentum of his strength and speed just before the body picks up the monotony of the exercise, which is why the "Pacman speed" is very evident in his fights because his speed and strength are still at the peak of the training momentum (Wilson n.d., n.p.).

What this seemingly implies is that Roach does not mind placing Pacquiao's body under riskier and more stressful workouts, as long as it is sure to sustain the strength and

speed of his fighter. Mirroring the nature of Roach and Pacquiao's trainer-fighter relationship, which is greatly characterized as familial rather than legal, this circumstance reverberates the neocolonial alliance between the United States and the Philippines, which is heavily grounded on partiality towards the interests of the O/other. Pacquiao possesses the organic composition of a superb athlete, but it is Roach who has made it possible for Pacquiao to bring his athletic form to the global scene. Having been Pacquiao's head coach since 2001, Roach's directive of Pacquiao's training is laudable and is deemed indisputable of its efficiency; if not for Roach's access and position in the arena of American boxing, Pacquiao would not have been granted entry to the international stadium of boxing. Paralleling this reciprocated bond between coach and athlete to the Philippines – U.S. neocolonial alliance, it elevates the quality of this signifying structure, implying that the former colony's present-day global progress and transnational participation is perennial to the privileges of the former colonizer.

### **The Fighting Pacquiao: the Profitable Product of the National Imagination**

The moment he steps into the ring, Manny Pacquiao is cheered on by two types of fans: the ones who patronize him for his dexterity and exceptional fighting skills, and the Filipinos who profess a blind devotion to their

*kababayan* (compatriot) who is now fighting on Western soil. In the early years of his fame, roughly around 2004-2009, it is a popular fact that Pacquiao's fights were days that subsided the riot and overturned the Sunday order in his homeland: fewer crimes were reported, the streets were nearly empty, Sunday masses in the morning had plenty of empty pews; Pacquiao's fights had the Filipinos glued to their television screens. The image of a fighting Pacquiao is a spectacle that operates on a double-tiered admiration, one that takes on a consumptive orientation and the other that takes on the lens of individual projection. His containment in the boxing ring, as spectacted by the Western gaze for their penchant amusement of exotic knowledge, serves to signify as a perimeter to condense, essentialize and unify the experience(s) of struggle that has become a key trope in the Filipino socio-cultural narrative. Made possible through the West's orchestration, Pacquiao is placed in a competitive arena to showcase his athletic valor for the West's consumption and to fight for his merited entry into international fame; as Pacquiao physically struggles to achieve both agendas, Filipinos from across the globe align their own ordeals of hardships with the Filipino boxer, collectively forming an abstract alliance with their other invisible *kababayans*.

The aspect in Pacquiao's boxing artistry that has attracted much attention is the strength and speed of his left hand punch; often dubbed as the "Pacman punch" or

“Pacman speed,” his notorious left hand jab has developed into various offshoots that are now known as some of his signature moves (*Evolve Daily*, n.d., n.p.), and many sports analysts and boxing enthusiasts have developed an extensive literature about this signature punch-speed combination. With many analysts frequently characterizing his boxing technique as ‘unorthodox’ due to his heavy left hand preference and ‘deceptive’ because his unpredictable hand-step coordination confuses his opponents (i.e. a right step would usually mean an immediate right hand punch, but Pacquiao intentionally disrupts this sequence), it is amenable to claim that Pacquiao’s aptitude as a boxer does not only lie in his naturally strong physique, but also in his poised and clever movements. It has been noted by these analysts that his movements are devoid of sloppy motions and are expertly calculated to land the signature punch, and the penultimate way to witness this remarkable choreography is to set up an organized fight for Pacquiao in a boxing ring.

Pacquiao’s longtime boxing promoter, American Bob Arum, has obviously weighed in on the profitability of seeing the Pacman punch in action, and has made it possible for the Filipino boxer to regularly exhibit his athletic prowess in the gambling capital of the United States. Arum has been known for the “lose a great star, create another one” strategy in his promotion endeavors (Pugmire 2016, n.p.), revealing the veteran’s attitude of establishing partition with his goods. With boxers as the main

products, the profit lies on which players would narrate the best stories in the ring, and Arum's extensive history of promoting Pacquiao's fights despite his no-strings-attached strategy reveals his bias towards the Filipino boxer. Perhaps, Arum has recognized that regardless as to who Pacquiao fights, a fight with this Southeast Asian Filipino boxer always has a story tell because the boxer himself has a good back story; the pairing of his rags to riches life story with the peculiar style of his boxing choreography carries with it a high exotic value for audiences in the United States. Furthermore, a Pacquiao fight automatically entails a following from his *kababayans*, given that Filipinos operate on a "Pinoy Pride" patronage with any Filipino who is recognized outside of the country (Cañete 2014, 115). Hence, Arum is confident in promoting Pacquiao's fights mainly because profits are secured, making Pacquiao an enticing product of choice in this trading jungle of the boxing industry. Circling back to the profitability of witnessing the Pacman punch in action, this economy of desire that the live audiences of Pacquiao's fights have participated in is fuelled by the appetite to witness and be overwhelmed by the exotic: live audiences are willing to shell out money to watch the peculiar and unorthodox movements of this non-Western public figure. Strategized like a veteran businessman, Arum has promoted Pacquiao according to the extent of the boxer's terms and conditions, and has posited him in a leveled space of flashiness (United States – Las Vegas – boxing stadium) that sets the motion for the



asiaphilic drive. However, it is important to note that in this particular system of capitalized desire, the product functions on a personal agenda: that he is fighting because he aims to validate the merits of his international fame. In his official autobiography, Pacquiao reflects on the ironical influence of his profession as a boxer, as a man who engages in violence to instill hope.

There is an irony in the fact that I am able to instill hope in people through my profession of boxing, which some view as one of violence – a fighter willing to go to war with anyone at any time. It has been said by ring announcers that I like to see my own blood. I can't say that is really true, but I cannot say that it is false. I just know the harder the battle I am in, the more I am working to fulfill my purpose. (Pacquiao 2010, 147)

It is with this premise that Pacquiao enforces the Filipino socio-cultural trope of “making it big,” and bringing this ideology with him as he steps into the ring initiates the greater communal production of this national narrative.

In the Philippines, it has been of a popular translation that a Pacquiao fight is the Filipino people's fight; that is, his matches were often interpreted as a form of diplomatic event in which Pacquiao's exhibition on the boxing ring is simply a more performative and radical representation of the Philippines as a nation. However, what distinguishes Pacquiao from being a mere poster boy is the

conscious rapport that the Filipino individual establishes with the boxer, an affinity that works on the more profound mechanism of shared suffering and perseverance. In the Philippines, Pacquiao's rags to riches narrative is one of the most iconic instances of this Filipino cultural aspiration to "make it big," and what distinguishes his story on a more admirable scale is that his elevation from rural marginalized poverty transcended the typical ascension to urban middle-class; hence, the impressive agency of Pacquiao's success story lies in the fact that his leveling up in the social ladder stretched from the extreme ends of the spectrum, from provincial poor to global billionaire. This is perhaps the basis of the willingness to establish an abstract rapport with Pacquiao, because by establishing this spiritual association with the boxer, the individual could attain the same magnanimity of success. This affiliation, which is grounded on transference, is what deepens the *kababayans* patronage to the Filipino boxer; the Filipino individual supports him because his pain and suffering as a marginalized member of the masses is a familiar status, his success story is something the individual would want to happen to oneself, and his glorified athleticism by the international audience always brings with it the Filipino identification. By positing Pacquiao within the parameters of the boxing ring, these individual causes of abstract affinity then become centralized and communal, marking an intensification of this spiritual association with the boxer; Pacquiao in the boxing ring prompts the shared patron-

age and alliance with him, and thus signifies the ultimate union of the Filipino consciousness. His agile body maneuvering across the boxing ring metaphors the robust breadth and expansion of this abstract Filipino identification, and the varying Pacman punch combinations he executes in the arena are dynamic symbols that signify the “fighting spirit” trope in the Philippine economy of aspiring to “make it big.” Furthermore, a Pacquiao fight transforms the boxing arena into a momentary physical manifestation of the imagined space, which the communal Filipino sensibility wanders; thus, the arena serves to temporarily herd these otherwise wandering modes of consciousness. Central to this temporary space of nationhood is Pacquiao’s moving body, which resonates as a strong metaphor for this imagined national alliance; a national imaginary that is robust, unpredictable and dynamic. Fleeting as it may be, a Pacquiao fight is a crucial element in the sustenance of this imagined nation because it brings to actuality a unified sense of Filipino identity.

### **The Flawed Product: The Injured Pacquiao and A Regression on Transnationalism and Globalization**

A day after the Pacquiao-Mayweather fight back in 2015, news broke of the Pacquiao team’s revelation (Okamoto and the Associated Press 2015, n.p.) that the Filipino

boxer did not fight at his best due to him being denied of an anti-inflammatory shot hours before the match (Sandritter 2015, n.p). According to official reports from Pacquiao's team and the Nevada Athletic Commission, Pacquiao tore his right shoulder's rotator cuff, a collection of muscles that secures the placement of the upper arm bone on the shoulder, in March of that year and was given treatment; however, his training for the fight with Mayweather paved for the resurfacing of the injury days prior to the fight. Pacquiao's team requested for an anti-inflammatory shot hours before he stepped on the ring, but was denied of the shot because the filed paperwork to the Commission did not clarify the details of the shoulder injury. Hence, Pacquiao fought with an aching right shoulder. However, the eventual dismay of fans towards the match was perhaps not due to Pacquiao's substandard performance; dubbed as the "fight of the century," the resulting match left the audiences underwhelmed by the monotony of Pacquiao and Mayweather's movements and the absence of the hyped-up 'knockout' punch, and the next day's exposé of Pacquiao's shoulder injury seemed to be a strategy to appease underwhelmed fans and/or to initiate the talks of a potential rematch. Whichever the agenda might have been, the alarming state of Pacquiao's injury became of central concern, and the years following its surgery and therapy caused a spiraling of Pacquiao's relationship with both Arum and Roach.

Pacquiao's injury in 2015 proved to be a pivotal juncture in the continuity and quality of the signifying gazes directed at his physique, because his damage has shattered the mysticism of his body and has fractured the wholeness of a national trophy. A rotator cuff injury is, in fact, a commonplace injury that anyone can obtain if one strenuously does a familiar activity (such as lifting a heavy chair) and this type of injury is not usually brought by a single, high-impact occasion; rather, it is caused by a wear and tear of the tissue ("Rotator Cuff Injury" 2018, n.p.) . Thus, Pacquiao's injury could be attributed to his training and sparring throughout the years, and cannot be wholly perceived as a heroic badge from a monumental brawl. Given the triviality of this shoulder damage, the injury depreciates the value of Pacquiao from mythical to mortal. Furthermore, according to an interview with orthopedic surgeon Dr. Surena Namdari by *Sports Illustrated*, rotator cuff injuries are also rooted in age, which proves to be a significant factor in the cause and treatment of the injury, and in the case of Pacquiao, it was a combination of age and repetition.

There are two kinds of rotator cuff tears: The type that occurs over time, which is called degeneration, and is most commonly found in older patients and in younger patients, tears are typically acute traumatic injuries, caused by lifting something heavy or experiencing an abnormal torque. I would suspect Pacquiao's was some of a combination of both. For Manny Pacquiao, boxing for so many number of

years, over time, the tendon may have experienced a gradual wear and tear. A lot of times in athletes it's a combination of wear and tear and specific impact events (Fischer 2015, n.p.).

This fact amplifies this newfound perception of Pacquiao as a mere mortal because he is ageing; moreover, the very advent of the injury breaks the illusion of his supposed dynamism and unorthodoxness because he obtained the damage through repetitive and mechanical acts. Dr. Namdari further explains that the surgery would take only an hour to an hour and a half, with six months recovery period; however, given Pacquiao's age, it was advised that his recovery was of a full year (12 months). Hence, this undeviated spotlight on Pacquiao's injury has only called attention to the fact that this exotic product and national trophy is ageing, bringing forward unfavorable notions of decay and deterioration.

Positing this revelation on the signifying structure of his body as a product of the national imagination, his injury regresses the value of the mysteriously potent colony, paving for a weakening of the reciprocity in this neocolonial dynamic. This premise was eventually given much enlightenment, for in the succeeding years since his rotator cuff surgery, Pacquiao's relationships with Roach and Arum took on their gradual decline. In April of 2018, Pacquiao announced that Roach would no longer be in his team for his upcoming fight with

Lucas Matthyse, signaling the end of their longstanding alliance since 2011; reasons for the separation were not fully exposed, but it seemed that it was Pacquiao who had let go of his head coach (Dawson 2018, n.p.). Prior to this separation from Roach, it was also announced by Arum's agency that Pacquiao would not be in the line-up of fights for the following months, with alleged reports that the boxer was hurt for being set up for an undercard match (Rafael 2018, n.p.). Based on numerous reports, the separation Pacquiao had with these longtime alliances were cordial; what perhaps posed as a shock was that the ruptures were seemingly synched. This disbanding with his American benefactors has brought forward a more independent Pacquiao; however, this post-injury version of Pacquiao as a self-promoted boxer who relies on a more nativist coaching (his coach now is his longtime friend Buboy Fernandez) garners a mixed following from his usual pool of fans. Again, positing these turn of events on the signifying structure of the Filipino boxer as metaphor, this post-injured and independent Pacquiao symbolizes a regression from transnational modes of relation and a negative participation to this era of globalization.

The onset of this spiraling could be largely attributed to the spotlight on his injury, in which the formerly value-laden product, whose financial worth was based on its mythical and dynamic quality, was revealed of its true agency as mortal and mundane. When the prod-

uct was subtracted of its 'exotic' market value, it was consequently reduced of its patronage from the Western gaze; whether it was truly Pacquiao who had let go of both Roach and Arum, his separation from these Western allies was an eventuality that both parties knew would happen due to Pacquiao's maturity as a boxer. With no U.S. intervention and hence no viewership of an international magnitude, Pacquiao is unable to execute a placement of himself within a temporary space of nationhood, therefore failing to prompt an imagined national alliance. However, this failure to actualize a national imaginary is not to be solely blamed on this ill-executed system, because Pacquiao's injury had already fractured the national imagination. The damaged and decaying Pacquiao called attention to the very reality of the Filipino nation's identity: that it is not as robust and dynamic as the Filipinos had imagined it to be. Upon announcing his July 2018 fight with Matthysse in April of the same year, many of his Filipino boxing fans have expressed their apprehensions of his return, with a general consensus that he has aged and has already achieved high fame for a boxer of his time (Aziz 2018, n.p.). With the realization that the national trophy is flawed, the Filipinos have ceased to put effort on forging a national alliance, in which Pacquiao is the central figure in this abstract space, because it does not ensure continuity and potency. Thus, Pacquiao as metaphor-product for this national and colonial imagination perhaps needs to be incubated and realigned of its course; it cannot be de-



nied that Pacquiao's fame had at least placed the Philippines on the map of international knowledge, so to completely neglect him as a national trophy would be a disregard of his hard work and an unfair erasure of a monumental era in Philippine sports history. However, the possibility for a new national metaphor to emerge is plausible especially since Pacquiao had already paved an opening to the Filipino's potential. Perhaps with this new metaphor, access to construct an imagined alliance of the nation would no longer rely on the profitability of its exoticized body, but on the genuine recognition that this new national symbol speaks to the sensibility of every Filipino.

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*“Doors That Could Take You  
Elsewhere” - Migration, Magic  
and Rancièrian Dissensus in  
Mohsin Hamid’s Exit West*

Paula Brauer

Mohsin Hamid’s novel *Exit West*, which was published in 2017, deals with one of the most topical and passionately discussed issues of its time: that of migration. When a war breaks out in their unnamed hometown, its two protagonists Nadia and Saeed find themselves forced to flee. The two thereupon make their way to the city of Marin in California via stops on Mykonos and in London. What makes their story stand out is that they do not travel by boat, plane or other modes of transportation that one may expect, but instead with the help of mysterious, black doors that when one steps through them transport one to a different country in a matter of seconds. But still, their journey closely resembles that



of many real-life migrants so that the novel is firmly anchored in the socio-political context of its time. The occurrence of inexplicable elements within an otherwise realistic setting is characteristic of magical realism, the mode of writing that originated in Latin America in the 1940s. As it is understood today, magical realism is the combination of the two elements that make up its name, something that is 'magical' and something that is 'realist'. The magical can be anything which stands in opposition to realism as the overall mode of a text as, in the words of Wendy B. Faris, an "irreducible element' that is unexplainable according to the laws of the universe as they have been formulated by modern, post-enlightenment empiricism, with its heavy reliance on sensory data" (2002, 102). In other words, there is a contradiction inherent to magical realism and yet the two ostensibly opposing elements exist peacefully alongside one another within the harmony of the text. Magical realism therefore holds an intrinsically hybrid character, itself the third space between two modes. That means that the magical elements' credibility is never questioned within the text. As Maggie Ann Bowers points out, magical realism relies on the reader's "full acceptance of the veracity of the fiction during the reading experience, no matter how different this perspective may be to the reader's non-reading opinions and judgments" (2004, 4). That is precisely what takes place in reading *Exit West*, where the mysterious doors operate on the same level of truth as the rest of the text.

Because it breaks with realism, which is associated with a Western literary tradition, and with Western genre categorizations magical realism is often seen as a means of non-Western rebellion against the West. Homi K. Bhabha comments in *Location of Culture* that “‘magical realism’ after the Latin American Boom, becomes the literary language of the emergent post-colonial world” (1990, 7). Such views run the risk of oversimplification if the West is solely associated with literary realism, which is in turn associated with rationality and order, while the non-West comes to signify the magical that breaks with these ideals. Even though it is true that many postcolonial magical realist works, especially the earlier ones from South America, were in one way or another inspired by the authors’ respective cultural traditions, what is problematic is the claim to absoluteness that lies at the bottom of this binarism between West and non-West; the former alone is entitled to logic and rationality, while the latter can only produce magical narratives. This two-sided depiction of non-Western magical realism is confuted by newer works such as *Exit West*. Here, the magical element is not derivative from any particular culture, which goes to show that magical realism should not be restricted to any location or context. But there is still the attempt to “undermine ‘purist’ representations of the world”, as Elleke Boehmer calls it, that can be attributed to the hybridity intrinsic to magical realism (1995, 242).

The aim of this article is to analyse the effects that the use of magical realism has on the novel's portrayal of migration as a political issue with the help of Jacques Rancière's work on the relation between arts and politics, especially the idea of dissensus. I will argue that because of the disruptive potential that is inherent to magical realism, dissensus is at work on multiple levels within the novel. For one, the category of distance is disintegrated. The doors that take the characters from place to place drastically decrease the time that it takes to travel between these places as opposed to traditional means of transportation. If we assume, as reviews of the novel have done, that it is set in the author's home town Lahore in Pakistan, then we are talking about a 14-hour flight and a distance of over 6500 kilometres that the novel covers in minutes, let alone the fact that illegal migrants like Nadia and Saeed would most likely not take the most straight-forward route and travel by plane. However, by stepping through the doors, the characters can sidestep the crossing of actual geographical borders that, in most cases, come with either governmental checkpoints and passport controls or the dangers of illegal border crossing. Because borders are means to demarcate territory and as such can amplify distance, their disruption has a decisive impact on the novel's portrayal of distance as a concept.

The analogy between doors and borders that *Exit West* draws is cleverly chosen for it carries a lot of metaphori-

cal implications. One need only think of the expression 'open door' to see their semantic closeness. An open border can be an open door, meaning an opportunity to start over for those who seek a better life. But like with most other opportunities or doors, not all are always open to everyone. Many countries close their borders at least partially and to some groups of people. A closed border means that the opportunity to start over and try one's luck in that country remains inaccessible. *Exit West* portrays this aspect of the analogy very well, as not any door can be taken at any time and each door will only ever lead to one specific place. What is more, some of them are blocked and closed by governments or militant groups, just like it is the case with some borders. Nadia and Saeed must pay someone to find them an exit route out of their home country. In this, they resemble those migrants who have no choice but to put their fate in the hands of people smugglers when it comes to illegal border crossings. One of the most feverishly discussed borders of recent years is that between Mexico and the USA. The novel picks up on this by depicting a Mexican orphanage:

many of the children in the House of the Children had at least one living parent or sibling or uncle or aunt. Usually these relatives laboured on the other side, in the United States, and their absences would last until the child was old enough to attempt the crossing, or until the relative was exhausted enough to return, or on occasion, quite often, for ever (Hamid 2017, 157)

It thereby illustrates the tremendous effects that borders, and the financial imbalance between the two sides they are separating, have on the lives of individuals. The doors facilitate many of these issues as they enable parents to go back and visit their children or to take their children with them in a safe and easy manner. The analogy of the doors further illustrates how entering another country might feel to some of the people that are native to that country as if someone was entering their private property. The primary function of doors is to keep unwanted intruders out. In the novel, it can happen that migrants unknowingly enter a new country through private doors. Such is the case in the scene in which the reader first encounters the phenomenon. It relates how a man exits from a magical door that doubles as a woman's closet door:

As Saeed's email was being downloaded from a server and read by his client, far away in Australia a pale-skinned woman was sleeping alone in the Sydney neighbourhood of Surrey Hills. Her husband was in Perth on business. [...] Her home was alarmed, but the alarm was not active. It had been installed by previous occupants, by others who had once called this place home, before the phenomenon referred to as the gentrification of this neighbourhood had run as far as it had now run. The sleeping woman used the alarm only sporadically, mostly when her husband was absent, but on this night she had forgotten. Her bedroom window, four metres above the

ground, was open, just a slit. [...] The door to her closet was open. Her room was bathed in the glow of her computer charger and wireless router, but the closet doorway was dark, darker than night, rectangle of complete darkness – the heart of darkness. And out of this darkness, a man was emerging. He too was dark, with dark skin and dark, woolly hair. (Hamid 2017, 5.)

The vocabulary in this scene creates an atmosphere of danger. Mentions of an alarm system and an open window allude to a burglary. That the stranger exiting the closet door is not a burglar but a migrant who did not willfully enter the woman's house will become clear only later in the novel.

It is only logical that the development set off by the doors culminates in the dissolution of geographical borders in the novel:

The news in those days was full of war and migrants and nativists, and it was full of fracturing too, of regions pulling away from nations, and cities pulling away from hinterlands, and it seemed that as everyone was coming together everyone was also moving apart. Without borders nations appeared to be becoming somewhat illusory, and people were questioning what role they had to play. (Hamid 2017, 155)

There is an even deeper meaning to this if one takes

into consideration the fact that many of the borders in the Middle East are fabricated vestiges of colonial times. In the sense that consensual politics are the “ways in which human communities are ‘spontaneously’ counted as wholes” the Western involvement in the creation of borders in the Middle East must be seen as an attempt to enforce Western consensus on other areas of the world (Corcoran 2010, 1). The sidestepping and blurring of borders in *Exit West* messes with this consensus. They therefore become an act of resistance against colonialism and against the global system of states whose aim it is to encase wealth and make resources inaccessible to the global poor.

*Exit West's* magical doors do not only decrease the distances between countries, but they also alter migration in several other ways. Firstly, because they shorten the time that it takes to travel they make the process a lot faster. Secondly, the doors make migrating a lot easier compared with the ‘traditional’ routes, because they are not as strenuous and as dangerous. There is a certain risk involved if you do not know exactly where it will take you. But none of the novel’s characters get harmed in the process and it loses its peril as the novel progresses and the characters get used to it. The doors are also less expensive. Although there are some which are controlled by traffickers, the myriad of new ones that arise mean that it is possible to find one on your own for free, whereas, in reality, payments to people smugglers

accrue in nearly all cases. Lastly, taking a door requires much less physical effort and hence is not dependent upon physical health. As a result, the possibility to migrate is open to more people in the novel. All of these factors lead to the massive extent that migration takes in it. Apart from the doors, this is the one aspect where the novel is largely out of touch with reality. However, with what I have pointed out above, it is obvious that the large flows of people are a direct result of Hamid's use of magical realism. His statements in *The New Yorker* indicate that this is more than a mere byproduct. When asked about the doors, he says that "they allowed [him] to compress the next century or two of human migration on our planet into the space of a single year" (Hamid 2017). What he suggests here is that with the help of the accelerating doors the novel provides a shortened version of the future. Such a version can obviously only be a prognosis as it presupposes that migration really is a steadily growing phenomenon that will take on such a large extent at some point in the future.

Forecasting and then contracting a possible future like that is a form of disrupting history. What is more, it is another level on which magical realism may become valuable for postcolonial writing. One of the main aims of early postcolonial writing was to rewrite history from the point of view of the formerly colonised people, because so-called 'official' historical writing was written predominantly from the colonizers' perspectives. This claim was



nurtured by the larger realization that all histories are constructed or, as Rancière puts it, belong “under the same regime of truth” as fiction (2004, 38). Magical realism is able to draw attention to the constructed character of any history and thereby sets the ground for the possibility of the coexistence of multiple histories, which Stephen Slemon refers to as a ‘double vision’ between ‘official history’ and what he calls “a cluster of opposing views that tend to see history more as a kind of alchemical process, somewhat analogous to a way of seeing, in which the silenced, marginalized, or dispossessed voices within the colonial encounter themselves form the record of ‘true’ history” (1995, 414). A notable example in this context is Gabriel García Márquez, whose *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is commonly received as a retelling of history from the perspective of the oppressed. At first glance, this appears to be fundamentally different from Hamid’s vision of a possible future. The latter does not alter existing narratives but creates a new one instead. Yet, the same postcolonial idea is detectable in both. In the words of Slemon, *Exit West* still qualifies as a “foreshortening of history” if not one that “metaphorically contains the long process of colonization and its aftermath” (1995, 411). Instead, it depicts a continuation of the decolonization project that culminates in a fictional world characterized by cultural hybridity where the borders between countries have been blurred so that one can no longer distinguish between a centre and the margins. Those who were excluded from colonial his-

torical accounts become the protagonists of this new narrative. Therefore, dissensus is at work in the novel on a historical level as well.

The decrease of distance and the shortening of time culminate in the overarching effect of shifting power relations. The consensual order determines who has the right to speak where and when based on the resources required to enter a political discourse. Rancière's argument is that it therefore leads to the exclusion of some, all while giving the outward impression that political choice is unanimous and without alternative (2010, 189). The excluded person becomes "the radical other, the one who is separated from the community for the mere fact of being alien to it, of not sharing the identity that binds each to all" (Rancière, 2010, 189). Political exclusion of this kind constitutes a migrant's reality. In most countries, the right to vote is generally limited to citizens. In a report on the political rights of refugees for the UNHCR, Ruma Mandal writes that "the vast majority of states do not give aliens, including refugees, the right to vote. Enfranchisement is still considered to be a privilege of citizenship, reflecting the allegiance between an individual and his/her State of nationality" (2003, 17). She contends that this is the case because "the granting of political rights [to aliens] is often seen as a threat to the national cohesion" (Mandal 2003, iv). This argument concurs with Rancière's notion of consensual politics, as that which "strives to reduce people to the population"

and justifies exclusion in the name of “a community that gathers together a single people” (2010, 189). Additional voters would threaten the consensus. She interposes that there are certain exceptions of states which permit foreign residents the right to vote at a local level or make other formal arrangements for them to have a say<sup>1</sup>. However, Rancière repeatedly stresses that structural enfranchisement is not the only factor that determines the distribution of the sensible, but that whether one possesses the resources that are required to speak up and participate in politics is equally as decisive. Such resources can be time or the ability to speak a certain language and to do so eloquently and persuasively. Those who are included in the political order are, according to Rancière, “men and women of action, and more specifically those who act through speech: generals, orators, princes and princesses, lawyers, etc.” (2011a, 12). Thus, the “distribution of the sensible reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed” (Rancière 2004, 12)<sup>2</sup>. Dissensus is any act that disrupts this order by redistributing the right to speak to include also those who were previously excluded. This is, for Rancière, the definition of politics, which he says, “reconfigures the distribution of the perceptible”, “introduces new objects and subjects onto the common stage”, “makes visible what was invisible” and “makes audible as speaking beings those who were previously heard only as noisy animals” (2011b, 4).

In *Exit West*, this exclusion of migrants from politics is made visible. Both in the refugee camp on Mykonos and the house in London, Nadia and Saeed live in what may be called parallel societies that exist outside of the political order of Greece and Great Britain. However, their situation in London is slightly different because on Mykonos, they live in a space allocated to them while in London they become participants in the illegal occupation of someone else's property, something that interestingly turns out to be a large-scale phenomenon. Because so many houses lie empty, their owners being foreigners who are away most of the time, those who enter them through closet or other doors decide to stay and make themselves at home. The overall effect is that "the more empty a space in the city the more it attracted squatters, with unoccupied mansions in the borough of Kensington and Chelsea particularly hard-hit" (Hamid 2017, 126). That is what happens in the house, which is also often referred to as a 'palace', that Nadia and Saeed incidentally find themselves in at their arrival. They have reservations at first, but because the luxury of a well-equipped house with a private room is too tempting after their time in the camp on Mykonos and because others are doing the same they decide to stay. When the housekeeper next shows up, the house "was already quite full, home to perhaps fifty squatters" (Hamid 2017, 123). Here it is brought to the reader's attention how much space is wasted when a house that can accommodate fifty people lies almost completely vacant,

something which is quite common in London and other expensive cities where there is a shortage of affordable living space as real estate prices soar due to foreign investment. This aspect of the novel can therefore most certainly be read as critical commentary on the housing situation in many bigger cities. But more than just that, *Exit West* undertakes a fictional redistribution of resources. It is exactly those parts of London that have become exclusive to the super-rich that are conquered by the migrants and turned into the exact opposite, a shelter for the homeless. Insofar as this disrupts the previous state of affairs, we can speak of dissensus. The result is a shift in power, as the migrants confer themselves a right the British government denies them. This is a political act not only because they fight against their exclusion but also because having a place to live is one of the prerequisites for political participation that Rancière deems so important.

When the British authorities first attempt to drive Nadia, Saeed and the rest out of the house they occupy they decide to fight back, not physically but by simply remaining where they are when prompted to leave. To their own surprise, they succeed. But the authorities soon turn to more drastic measures when they encircle the occupied areas and cut them off from all supplies so that the political exclusion of the new migrant population turns into their physical exclusion. What is clear though is that their ability to resist has forced the British authorities

and the wider public to change their handling of the situation and has thus given the migrants back a say in their own futures. In what follows, the authorities begin to develop constructive approaches to cohabitation. The migrant population is resettled to the outskirts of London where they are promised their own places to live if they help with the construction (Hamid 2017, 167). For the meantime they are put up in temporary accommodation. While this may seem like a fair exchange that leads to the creation of hybrid spaces at first, the novel soon reveals that such is not the case. The migrants are driven away from the centre of London which thus is regained by the powerful and rich elite. In a manner that is not dissimilar from the situation earlier on, they are concentrated in one place so that a mixing with the previous population is largely prevented. Moreover, the way that the project is structurally laid out keeps intact a balance of power. Hamid reveals that no “natives lived in the dormitories, for obvious reasons. But natives did labour alongside migrants on the work sites, usually as supervisors” (2017, 176). The so-called “time tax” that is set up also favours those who have stayed in the country longer than others because it purports that “a portion of the income and toil of those who had recently arrived on the island would go to those who had been there for decades, and this time tax was tapered in both directions, becoming a smaller and smaller sliver as one continued to reside, and then a larger and larger subsidy thereafter” (Hamid 2017, 168). In other words, although the

migrants attain a change of politics they are still not actually members of the political community. Any positive changes that occur are just the results of the established system reacting to them.

Even though it is never stated in the novel, we can assume that their ongoing political exclusion is part of the reason why Nadia and Saeed decide to leave London and start over once again. Located near San Francisco, Marin, their third and, as far as we know, final place of residence, is similar to the new cities built in the outskirts of London in terms of location but it is much more self-organized. What makes it distinctively different is that its residents actively pursue the reshaping of political structures. They begin to set up an electoral system. While their goals are only tentative, they are aimed at counteracting the problematic exclusionary character of politics that Rancière also criticizes. Their experiential approach to dissensus is not to adapt the existing system but to create an entirely new one which can be adapted to the needs of the new community as they go. The chaos set off by the doors provides them with the opportunity to do so, whereas under more realistic circumstances breaking up existing political structures may be much harder. As part of the project to create an assembly, they begin to also develop a system of identification that “could be the key to the plebiscite, at it made it possible to tell one person from another and to ensure they could vote only once” (Hamid 2017, 220). While the

necessity is evident, it is also clear that, considering the intrinsic link between identity documents and systems of citizenship, such a system will result in the formation of a group, or population if you may, that includes some and excludes others. This shows us that despite their attempts to establish a more just political system, such an undertaking is not easy and there are many issues and questions yet to solve. The novel's ending leaves open how the world will further transform. We get the sense that rather than being better or worse, it is just different. What is interesting is that the city of Marin, California, actually exists and that its history resembles the events of the novel. Matt Pamatmat summarizes the history of how Marin was formed:

The general area of Sausalito was a shipbuilding community in the 1940s that produced boats for the war effort. Black port workers left the hostile, segregated, opportunityless Jim Crow South and migrated to Marin City, cohabitating peacefully with white neighbors in a community of colleagues where everyone was provided housing. It was a community that generally got along, neighbors watching out for each other. However, after the war, as jobs disappeared, 'white flight' followed, and the remaining folks were left jobless and unskilled outside of shipbuilding. (Pamatmat 2004)

Does the author want to suggest an equally doomed future for his characters by linking the novel's plot to these developments? I think not, for the circumstances under which the novel takes place are so different that they will



most likely lead to a different output. Instead I think that this is another way in which it aims to rewrite history in favour of the disadvantaged and excluded. In a sense, the citizens of Marin are given a second chance.

## Notes:

1. A notable exception is the United Kingdom, where all resident Commonwealth and Irish citizens are permitted to vote, which makes up a large proportion of immigrants. States which give out partial voting rights at the local administrative level to residents are Ireland, Sweden, Iceland, Norway, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands and Peru (Mandal 2003, 18).

2. In this aspect, Rancière's theory closely resembles the capabilities approach developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum which "specifies some necessary conditions for a decently just society, in the form of a set of fundamental entitlements of all citizen" (Nussbaum 2006, 155). This has brought to attention the insufficiency of granting rights if people are not capable of exercising them. Nussbaum also emphasizes that "the need to focus on capability becomes especially clear when we consider cases in which individuals are hampered in various atypical ways by the very structure of their society" (2006, 165).

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In his introduction to *Restating Orientalism: A Critique of Modern Knowledge* Wael Hallaq, gives us a profound nautical metaphor which captures the essence of his relationship with his antecedent, Edward Said's *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (1978) as being neither to improve nor displace it. "Said's work", he writes, "provides me with the flare, though not the tools, to navigate my seas. If the metaphor is at all apt, I might say that in this work I hijack Said's ship to reequip it for the exploration of oceans that he could see dimly from afar, if at all" (8). Hallaq's book in review here, it can be said therefore, is simultaneously about as well as not about Said's celebrated work which remains the standard in setting

the terms of the debates around any critique of orientalism. He acknowledges his debt early in the book that it was Said who “lifted orientalism from its uninterrogated subterranean normativity to a focus of critique, if not doubt” (6) and that “without his contribution, [he] very much doubts that this book would have been possible” (viii). However Orientalism is not the *terminus ad quem* of *Restating Orientalism* but only becomes an indispensable point of entry into the real forces that precipitate the actions that orientalism is accused of performing and the attributes that it is accused of having.

In brief, Hallaq’s book then, as implicit in its subtitle, is concerned actually with developing a critique of the entire range of modern knowledge structures – and central to it the modern subject and its constitution as the agent underwriting those structures – that produce, emplot and envelop orientalism. European colonialism has been inherently genocidal and it is the entire production of knowledge, not just orientalism, which has gone into its making. In doing this it makes its departure from the parameters of colonial discourse analysis which Said was instrumental in establishing, but which also, in the form of postcolonial studies, has been unable to achieve much because, in its oppositions and resistances to late modernity its literary approach makes for, to use Foucauldian terms, “immediate struggles” that look not for the “chief enemy” but for “immediate enemies”. Approaching orientalism merely as a field of specialization

within the academia that has been inflicted with certain epistemological problems or for that matter simply uncovering traces of racist discourse in European literature does not do anything substantial in explaining the structural base – and the genocides that are embedded within it – that make orientalism possible. It only ‘scapegoats’ orientalism and fails, even refuses, to “appreciate the full force of orientalism’s destructive power as a *modern form of power*” (10).

We might as well start with how Said’s problematic critique becomes nothing less than a function of the very discursive formation he purported to critique –reinforcing its formation and reasserting its power while so brilliantly exposing it. This comprises largely the first three chapters of the book. Hallaq locates the origins of Said’s problem with the problematic adoption of Foucault’s understanding of the place of individual agency in the formation of power discourses. Said had himself acknowledged that *Orientalism* could not have been written without Foucault’s concepts of discourse and discursive formations and also his view that representations are always influenced by the systems of power in which they are located. However, Said’s critics had detected major inconsistencies in his use of Foucault’s concept of discourse where Said appeared to be alternating between the idea that true representation is theoretically possible and the opposite that all representation is necessarily misrepresentation. Said had been aware of this

fundamental paradox inherent in his book but was able to explain it as part of his design – to expose a problem using a method that was Foucauldian but also to suggest an exit from that problem using a method that was anti-Foucault. This was a result of Said's gradual disenchantment with Foucault that was reflected clearly in his *The World, the Text and the Critic* (1983) where he outlined his credo of the politically engaged intellectual, a position he considered Foucault – with his political quietism emanating from his overwhelming sense of everything being historically determined – to have moved away from in his later years.

Critical theory which had been marked in its early phase with a desire to transform society had gradually turned, on being transported to the American academia, into a mere academic exercise, retreating into a labyrinth of textuality. For Said, reading texts for their play/pleasure (*jouissance/plaisir*) should be of less value than the concrete effects of 'word politics' – and to do this the critic must first understand her involvement with the 'Text'. What they failed to understand was their contribution in creating an aesthetic category called literature, a cultural agency, that became more and more blind to its actual complicities with power. Said elaborated this thesis further in his *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) and gave a call to revive the 'responsibility' which had been abdicated by the scholar – the humanist who rises above the particular conditions of its production to furnish 'universal hu-



man truths'. Said's perceptive insights into the oppositions between scholarly objectivity and worldly motives, discursive regimes and authorial intentions may have proved liberatory for a generation of scholars, but in its humanist claims appeared to mimic the essentialising discourse it attacked. His strongly felt need to break free from the sophisticated intellectualism of undecidability and the political quietism of advanced theory with his own brand of 'insurrectionary scholarship' brings the age old discrepancy between the finitude of the thinking rational subject and the infinite variety of the world back to a full circle, by bringing the 'subject' – diagnosed in much poststructuralist and postmodern thought as the source of epistemological poverty that informs Western humanism - back to the forefront.

When Hallaq writes that *Orientalism* unwittingly reinforced the very discursive formation Said set out to critique, it is this deeply held hope and belief in the modern project as an extension of the Enlightenment sensibility that is emphasised. If there is any response to the legitimacy of imperialism that orientalism creates, it is not to replace but re-integrate the deprived periphery to the powerful centre more fully. The anthropologist James Clifford had written that Said adopted the conscious position of 'oppositionality' that 'writes back' against "imperial dominance from the position of an oriental whose actuality has been distorted and denied - and yet – a wide range of humanist assumptions escape

Said's oppositional analysis, as do the discursive alliances of knowledge and power produced by anti-colonial and particularly nationalist movements" (Clifford 1980, 214). Taking Clifford's argument further, Hallaq pulls the rug beneath the feet of the liberal and secular humanist whose anthropocentrism is structurally entwined in violence and genocide because it is "incapable of sympathy with the non-secular Other" as it is "anchored perforce, in a structure of thought (generated through the Enlightenment and culminating in the modern condition) wholly defined by modes of sovereign dominance" (5). He even attributes the canonicity and popularity of Said's groundbreaking *Orientalism* to its ability to consolidate rather than critique what the moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre calls liberalism's "interminable disagreement" (5).

Thus making the liberal subject and its sovereignty the locus and focus of a restructuring critique Hallaq exonerates orientalism as a "symptom, rather than the cause or chief culprit, of a psychoepistemic disorder plaguing modern forms of knowledge to the core" – and this includes a range of fields like science, engineering, history, philosophy, economics, law and business schools, all generally considered as neutral even though they have for long served ideological purposes. The main thrust of the book's argument – that when we deal with orientalism we would be terribly amiss if we do not approach it as the distillation of the foundational crisis knowledge is

thus strongly reinforced in chapters 3, 4 and 5. They deal with problems that had been absent in Said's book and continue to be largely so in the discourses that he generated – primarily the sovereignty of the Western subject. He cites the German philosopher Max Scheler who had effectively argued that the modern Western man's inherent "struggle for knowledge" that "grows out of an innate drive impulse" actually "sprung from an underlying a priori will- and value-structure centered upon the desire to dominate the material world" (91). The primitive origins of this belief he locates in the European Christian dogma that was transformed into secularized forms mainly through the genocides of the 'long sixteenth century': "The process of secularization brought about by the century heralded the need to break away from the ethical constraints that Christianity seems to have wanted to escape but could not fully accommodate"(87).

A viable alternative is provided in chapter 2 through the case study of premodern Islamic societies which never produced anything like *Orientalism* because in its schema the basis of knowledge was humility and gratitude of the subject in relation to nature. The story of the reconstitution of the modern subject is not entirely complete in this book at least and draws the readers back to the entire oeuvre of the writer - from his erudite *Sharia: Theory, Practice, Transformations* (2009) through *The Impossible State* (2013) to his future project that he tentatively titles 'Reforming Modernity'. Elucidating further on

the concepts of sovereignty, materialism, gratitude and humility through the writings of the Moroccan moral philosopher Taha Abdur Rahman's theories on the subject, where the relationship between man and nature is defined not in terms of domination but custodianship, Hallaq posits this ethical base of responsibility as the building block of the concept of the new human. To study *Restating Orientalism* is therefore to drive us to find alternatives about who we are.

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