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EDITORS' NOTE

The latest issue of *Postcolonial Interventions* is being published at a time when the very idea of academia in India is under discursive and material assaults from multiple corners. Over the last couple of months we have seen the students of various premier academic institutions across the country taking to the streets to voice their anger against laws that are divisive, politics that breeds intolerance and violence, policies that strive to destroy the foundations of public funding in education, governmental regimes that deliberately marginalise sections of the population and take away their rights in the name of nation, security and law and order, elected representatives who are abominable in their bigotry and adminstrations that violate consitutional provisions for parochial political gains. In the process, such students and their instiutions have also been subjected to assaults, threats, harassment, incarceration and vulgar stigmatisation in social networks and certain sections of the print and electronic media. And yet, those students, their well-wishers and sympathisers, their teachers and many other utterly unrelated individuals have also been able to create steadfast bonds of solidarity through which they have stood firm in the face of bullets, iron rods, acid, police batons, water canons, tear gas and the dissemination of atrocious calumnies. This is an Indian winter that sums up in many ways the essence of postcolonialism as a whole: oppression unleashed in the form of

binary-driven, colonially derived discourses of power and dominance juxtaposed with variegated shades of defiance, resistance and hope radiant with trnasformative, pluralistic energies that look forward to futures of untrammeled potentialities.

Some of these shades and energies are evident from the articles that are included in this issue. It begins with Arpita Chattaraj Mukhopadhyay's featured article on Toni Morrison which pays tribute to the majestic and pioneering oeuvre of nobel laureate Morrison whose novels not only document the consummate negation of racial bondage, dilocation and attendant violence but also evoke a panorama of hope through visions of love, compassion and solidarity. She was till her dying breath one of those ambassadors from the Republic of Conscience that Heaney spoke of and it is fitting that this open issue of 2020 should begin with recollection of her astounding literary achievements.

This is followed by Irina Armianu's exploration of female agency and embattled socio-cultural identities in the literary texts of contemporary African women writers like Malika Mokkedem, Nina Bouraoui, and Paulina Chiziane. Her analysis serves to illuminate the networks of colonial hegemony, patriarchy and migrancy within which idnetities and constantly assembled, re-configured and negotiated.

This is followed by Emily Shoyer's paper on the photographs of Owanto which foreground the issue of fe-

male genital mutilation which continues to be practiced in various parts of Africa and Asia even now. Shoyer's analysis showcases how Owanto's photographs mark a critical intervention in the debates surrounding FGM from mutliple culturalist and feminist perspectives through a typically Barthesian framework.

The conflicts between colonial and eurocentric religious and cultural prerogatives and those advocated by indigenous religions and cultures of the colonised is something that also acquires centrality in Emanuel Adeniyi's analysis of Jorge Amado's *The War of the Saints*. The analysis focuses on the clash between Catholic and Yoruba beliefs and practices in the context of colonial Brazil and the reinforcement of colonial perspecxtives in Jair Bolsonaro's contemporary regime.

The perpetuation and interrogation of colonial stereotypes is also focus of Jameel Alghaberi's paper which showcases how the texts of authors like Laila Halaby, Rabih Alameddine or Alia Yunis are repeatedly questioning the orientalist stereotypes regarding Arabs which have significantly shaped popular perceptions in America and the West, especially in the context of the post-9/11 scenario and attendant growth of Islamophobia.

However, cosniderations of race and gender are also intricately associated with networks of capital and this

is foregrounded in Crystal Baines' analysis of Arundhati Roy's recent novel *The Minstry of Utmost Happiness* which critiques the idea of development by portraying a wide array of exclusionary and marginalising processes that often underpin developmental projects. This is followed by Nadia Butt's analysis of Amitav Ghosh's canonical text - *The Shadow Lines* which acquries renewed relevance in our times on account of the flames of communal discord that are constantly being fanned in the subcontinent as well as the ongoing tensions between India and Pakistan.

The final contribution of this issue offers a review of Nirmala Menon's *Remapping the Postcolonial Canon: Remap, Reimagine and Retranslate* which seeks to chart avenues for future research within the realm of postcolnial studies.

If there is any undelying note among these diverse articles it is that of a shared comitment to justice, plurality, compassion and solidarity. These are not just keywords for journal articles or classroom discussions. These are ideals which are being threatened and these are ideals which we must protect through conscious, concerted actions. Let us hope that all our reading, writing and research will help us protect these ideals - for us and our future generations - both within the academia and in the wider world which it strives to improve.

"Unspeakable Things Unspoken": Toni Morrison's Legacy of 'Rootedness', 'Rememory' and 'Playing' with Differences

Arpita Chattaraj (Mukhopadhyay)

> Silence from and about the subject was the order of the day. Some of the silences were broken, and some were maintained by authors who lived with and within the policing strategies. What I am interested in are the strategies of breaking it. (Morrison 1992, 51)

In her Nobel Acceptance speech delivered in 1993, Toni Morrison (18 February, 1931 - 5 August, 2019) narrates a story about a blind old woman, a seer , living at

the margins of the community and a group of young boys who are unconvinced of her mythical powers. In the story, the boys tease the old woman, placing a bird in her hand and asking whether it was living or dead. The wise old woman answered, "It is in your hands" (1993). The anecdote, especially the woman's enigmatic response, is a metaphor for the poignant relationship that men and women, especially the African-Americans, have with their ancestors; it is also a parable of the inextricable links between knowledge and power, the limits and possibilities of language and the responsibility of the artist towards her community. These are perhaps the iterative concerns articulated in the entire breath of Morrison's work. An author of eleven novels, children's fiction, nonfiction, criticism and libretto, Toni Morrison is an artist who received both popular acceptance and critical attention. Her work reveals her commitment to the recovery of black history by unpacking the collective and individual black lives, speaking to the present while crafting an envisioned future. The men, women, children of her novels are reminders or manifestations of the stories that were suppressed, forgotten, 'passed on', but needed to be articulated, sustained and carried forward. Morrison tried to speak the 'unspeakable' and bring to centre, in her work, that has been historically marginalised.

Morrison has been steadfast in her assertion of artistic autonomy which is not always coterminous with an un-

questioning adherence to 'tradition'. Her first novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970) reminds one of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), yet she steers clear of the modes of representation favoured by her predecessors. In an interview with Charles Ruas, Morrison emphasizes this difference: "I was preoccupied with books by black people that approached the subject (the African-American girl) but I always missed some intimacy, some direction, some voice. Ralph Ellison and Richard Wright – all of whose books I admire enormously – I didn't feel were telling me something. I thought they were saying something about it or us that revealed something about us to you, to others, to white people, to men." (Ruas 1994, 96) In *The Bluest Eye* (1970) Morrison explores the complexity of racial identity experienced by a black girl child, Pecola Breedlove who is a tragic casualty of the apathy and cruelty heaped upon by society. In this novel, Morrison treats the troubling issues of parental neglect, child-rape, family dysfunctionality and racial discrimination with remarkable tenderness and poignancy. The empathy and 'presentness' that set her apart in her first novel only grow deeper with time and artistic maturity. The predicament of the black child in a hostile and unstable world has been an iterative motif in Morrison's work since her first novel. Her last novel *God Save the Child*, published in 2015, suggests a circularity of her engagements and creative agendas. Bride, the central protagonist, is scarred by her unloved childhood, her mother's disdain and her father's abandonment. Towards the end of the novel Morrison employs a magic realistic twist when Bride

undergoes strange physical transformations, regressing towards her girlhood. The trajectory of Morrison's work manifests her concerns with what it is to be a black, especially a black woman, in a society that thrusts 'invisibility' upon them. Her work evolves with the untiring and unflinching self-examination with regard to the role of an African-American woman writer in negotiating language and narratives to question and dismantle the hierarchies of power that withhold the freedom of individuals of particular race, class and gender. Morrison has left behind a majestic legacy of fictional and non-fictional work, but the singularity of her heritage is the freedom of thought and audaciousness of hope that her writing generates in her readers. Trudier Harris's enthusiastic claim in an early essay is valid and richly deserved:

> By any standard of literary evaluation, Toni Morrison is a phenomenon, in the classic sense of a once-in-a-lifetime rarity, the literary equivalent of Paul Robertson, Michael Jordan, Wayne Gretzky, Chris Evert, or Martina Navratilova, the superstar whose touch upon her profession makes us wonder if we shall ever see her like again. The indelible word portraits she has created, the unforgettable mythical and imaginary places, the exploration of the psychological trauma of slavery, racism, and war, and the sheer beauty of prose that frequently reads like poetry have assured Morrison a place in the canons of world literature. (1994, 9)

Toni Morrison shared the common concerns that were

articulated by the group of African American women writers such as Gwendolyn Brooks, Nikki Giovanni, Audre Lorde, Alice Walker et al who were committed to the task of consolidating the agency of the black American women. The early novels of Morrison coincided with the rising awareness of the specifity of the black woman's experience which often times was blindsided by the dominant Euro-American feminist discourses. In *Sula* (1973), Morrison closely examines the intertwined lives of two young black women, Nel and Sula, from their childhood onwards to trace the connections between individual lives and their community. The recalcitrant figure of Sula anticipates Morrison's later creations such as Pilate, Jadine, Florens and Bride. Sula is , as described by Morrison in "Unspeakable Things Unspoken : The Afro-American Presence in American Literature" , " quintessentially black, metaphysically black...She is the new world black and new world woman extracting choice from choicelessness... improvisational, daring, disruptive, imaginative, modern, out- of- the- house, outlawed, unpolicing, uncontained and uncontainable" (1997, 233). Sula is a self-proclaimed individualistic, a pariah to her community, who measure their sense of superiority by the fiendishness that they identify in Sula. As Pecola does with her 'ugliness' in The Bluest Eye, Sula does with her 'evilness'- both purify the society around them , their perceived otherness compensate for the inadequacies the community suffers from : " Their conviction of Sula's evil changed them in unaccounted yet mysterious

ways...they...in general band together against the devil in their midst" (Morrison 1997, 117). Morrison's understanding of Sula as "an artist with no art form" (Taylor-Guthrie 1994, 121) underscores the radical individualism and rebelliousness that define her, the 'otherness' compelling a reconfiguration of the categories of the black womanhood. Unlike her friend Nel, who chooses the safety of domesticity, Sula rejoices in self-creation. She loses herself when she surrenders her autonomy to Ajax, the recurring image of the black man in Morrison's work as the irresponsible, infantile, abandoning figure.

Morrison incorporates several myths and folktales unique to the African-American experience in her novels. Her interpretation and employment of these myths however, reveal her aesthetic and artistic mission to probe deeper and identify hitherto unexplored patterns. The 'universalist' assumptions of the mythical vision are revised by Morrison to address the concerns of the minority and the marginalised. In *Song of Solomon* and *Tar Baby*, Morrison reinvents the relevant myths to provide a more poignant perspective to the 'lived' experiences of the African Americans. Her re-mythification of the tropes of the 'flying Africans' and the 'tar baby' introduces several issues that turns the scope of analysis and exploration inwards. Morrison avoids the didacticism and self-pity that often diffuses the intensity of 'literatures of suffering'; the courage and wisdom that is manifest in her introspective vision is especially evident

in her handling of the myths and folklores. The 'flying African' myth of Solomon, an Icarian masculine myth, is reconceptualised in Song of Solomon not only as a flight from oppression and exploitation but also as an act of abandonment. Solomon flies off from family and social responsibilities leaving behind wife and children. Morrison underscores this ambivalence of the motif of male flight:

> I used it not only in the African sense of whirling dervishes and getting out of one's skin, but also in the majestic sense of a man who goes too far, whose adventures take him far away...black men travel, they split, they get on trains, they walk, they move...It's a part of black life, a positive, majestic thing, but there is a price to pay – the price is the children. The fathers may soar, they may triumph, they may leave, but the children... remember, half in glory and half in accusation. (Watkins 1994, 46)

In the novel, Milkman Dead redefines the paradigms of the hero of the Western myth - he too is on a quest inviting immediate comparisons with Jason and the Golden Fleece or Ulysses's journey home but his journey is more historically specific combining the individual and the community. It is a quest not only for self-definition or self - aggrandisement but also to retrace his culture and ancestry. By the end of the novel, Milkman does not 'fly 'towards individual freedom but rushes towards his wounded friend Guitar. In *Tar Baby*, Morrison uses the

Tar baby myth as a subtext for exploring the undercurrents of racial constructions bringing together the white and the black in closer interactive spaces to provide a composite picture of American society. The novel reveals Morrison's engagement with the multiple possibilities of the concept of blackness through the representations of Jadine and Son. The Tar baby story has several connotations, in the African - American variation the farmer or fox figure is the white master who is continuously being outmanoeuvred by the 'trickster' figure of the rabbit. The trickster figure a part of an oral tradition stands in opposition to a repressive system. The trickster becomes a source or symbol of self-respect and moral superiority in a discriminatory society. Tar Baby marks Morrison's increasing concern with the role of black aesthetics and the black artist caught between the conflicting pulls of black nationalism and a global multiculturalism. Jadine the Sorbonne-educated Parisian model is the 'black face' that fetishizes and commodifies a particular brand of blackness, whereas Son is the embodiment of the 'excess' that is associated with blackness in the construction of racial identity. Jadine too associates 'tar' with the authentic vision of the black woman compared to which she finds herself inadequate. Thus 'tar' in Morrison's novel also becomes a trap in which the characters find themselves locked in their attempts of self-definition. Blackness is thus constructed by Morrison as an ontological essence, an ethical practice, a historical fact and a way of seeing.

Beloved (1987) is Morrison's attempt to recover a history of blackness which is marked with pain, humiliation and dehumanisation. It is also an act of reclamation of the 'sixty-million and more' lives lost in the Middle Passage and slavery from oblivion; it is also a communal exorcising of the past, a commitment to remember and resurrect the stories that were passed on. The depiction of history in Beloved, Morrison's fictional reconstruction of the interior life of Margaret Garner as the model for Sethe and the return of the murdered child as a young woman to haunt the present compel a reviewing of the interpretative strategies of reading the novel. The urgency of the novel was felt by Morrison since she identified an unease in the American consciousness to come to terms with the reality of slavery in its past. She insists that the book was necessary because , "...it is about something the characters don't want to remember, I don't want to remember, black people don't want to remember, white people don't want to remember" (Bonnie 1989, 120-122). Morrison intended the book as a corrective to this historical amnesia, to provide an alternative story, a counter - argument, a different but a valid version of the historical 'reality'. The novel is set in the Reconstruction era following the Civil war and using the trope of reconstruction as a metaphor. 124 Bluestone Road becomes the locus of the unresolved histories that come back to haunt those who are left behind. Morrison unsettles the boundaries between fact and fiction, past and present, public and private in the novel which

emerges as a palimpsest of the lives that were never remembered or acknowledged. The novel becomes an act of 'rememory', slipping between the genres of family romance, ghost-story, neo-slave narrative, to offer a vision of healing from the trauma and grief of loss. At the centre of the novel is the horrific act of infanticide; Sethe the fugitive slave mother in an desperate attempt to save her infant child from being taken back by the slave-catchers murders her child. The story is modelled upon a real-life incident of Margaret Garner, which Morrison came across while editing Black Book. Morrison reworks this incident in her novel to recover, repossess and rename the stories of slavery that were forgotten or neglected. Morrison's project, therefore, is intertwining the individual tragedy with the collective histories of suffering. She compels the readers to raise quite a few questions at Beloved's return to the centre of Sethe's story in 124 Bluestone: Who is Beloved? Why does she return? Is she the slaughtered child, come back to haunt the mother with an irredeemable grief? Is she the embodiment of the history that is lost? Is she one of or all of the 'sixty millions and more'? Is she living or dead? Morrison agitates the framework of understanding history as linearity of sequences and emphasises the importance of unravelling the traditional narratives to discover the disremembered and excluded. The novel ends with the exorcising of the spectral presence of Beloved by the female community led by Ella and thirty other women ; it also ends with the word 'Beloved' as if it were a

prayer, an assertion, a plea for forgiveness, a chant for hope. This circularity of the movement suggests the impossibility of ever escaping the past, especially for the African –Americans with their fraught and complicated history. Morrison's scepticism with 'postmodernism' as a label however does not undermine the relevance of Linda Hutcheon's insight in this context , " The past is not something to be escaped, avoided, or controlled... the past is something with which we must come to terms and such a confrontation involves an acknowledgement of limitation as well as power" (Hutcheon 1988, 58). Morrison revisits this act of deconstructing and reconstructing of history in order to narrativise the African-American experience from the criss-crossing networks of slavery, tortured motherhoods, lost children, emasculated men, in a later novel *A Mercy* (2008) which serves as a prequel to *Beloved*. Geneva Cobb Moore calls it a 'demonic parody', a la Northrop Frye:

> Morrison's *A Mercy* qualifies as a demonic parody of the colonial American experience for Native Americans, black Africans, black Americans, with demonic imagery of their gradual genocide and enslavement emphasizing the hell on earth they suffered, shortly after the arrival and settlement of the Europeans. (Moore 2011, 3)

Like *Beloved*, the novel recounts another act of 'mother-love', 'a mercy', a mother giving up a girl child to a be-

nevolent master in slavery than risking rape and torture at the hands of a malevolent one. The novel opens with Florens articulating her 'mother hunger', her feeling of abandonment by her mother ; the novel closes with Florens' *minhamae* attempting to justify her act of 'mercy' just as Sethe does in Beloved, rationalising her murderous act of love . Morrison however does not limit the scope of the novel to just being about slavery, rather, it becomes a tapestry of several lives – the Anglo-Dutch settler Jacob Vaark, his wife Rebekka, the Native-American slave Lina, the strangely apart girl Sorrow, the free Blacksmith and the indentured labourers , Willard and Scully. Morrison articulates her interest in that time of American history when the New World was 'ad hoc' and fluid. *A Mercy* provides a view from the margin of a society still in the process of formation, at a threshold of modernity in terms of colonization, slave trade and capitalism. Morrison's 'historian' in this case is a daughter of slavery, Florens who invites the readers into a history of a nation to be formed, communities to be forged, people to be decimated or enslaved : " Don't be afraid. My telling can't hurt you ..." (2008, 1). Morrison, the literary archaeologist (Morrison 1995, 92), offers counter-narratives against totalising histories , while realigning the categories of motherhood, childhood, community, family, race, gender , class and nation from the distinctive vantage of the black American experience. Morrison is an archivist with a bricoleur's vision assembling and reassembling diverse histories, including the Salem

witchcraft's trial, King Phillip's war, the Middle Passage, construction of slave laws, to recover the lost, hidden or marginalised histories. Karavanta points out, "Morrison's text does not simply rewrite the history of American national community's origins but also counter writes the entire tradition of frontier literature that has translated the agony and struggle of the frontiersman to fulfil his Manifest Destiny into cultural figuration of nation building" (2012, 739). Just as the women in *Beloved* provided a piecemeal, fragmented yet in unanticipated ways a continued narrative of black American womanhood, the women in *A Mercy* - Florens, Lina, Rebekka, Sorrow - offer an interesting archive of the stories from the marginalised positions. Florens writes her story on the walls and then burns down the house – a metaphor for owning one's own story and deciding one's own destiny while dismantling the hegemonic , unyielding structures of the 'master's' narratives.

Displacement, migration and journey are major motifs in Morrison's novels which suggest their centrality to the black American experience. In *Jazz* (1992), the City is the backdrop to the story of Joe and Violet Trace who have migrated from the rural South. The City in the novel is the 1920s Harlem, which witnessed a massive influx of black population predominantly from the rural South and gradually morphed into a centre of black aesthetic renaissance. The City, however also represents the second displacement of the black Americans, the first/

original being the Middle Passage, which uprooted them from their ancestral homes to the American shores into slavery. Displacement on several levels – physical, psychological, psychical – connects the characters with the City. The City provides a site for retracing the trauma of fragmentation, the sterility of alienation, while the oral and written language offers the possibilities of improvisations and structures of the jazz and blues. Jazz provides a cultural mooring, a particular African – American ethos to the narrative apart from allowing multiplicity of voices and points of views. There is no single story, neither is there a single or dominant voice. Morrison has an uncanny ability of mediating the breaks and silences in the individual and collective histories to narrate the particular nuances of the African American lives. The story of *Jazz* is in many ways a continuation of the story of *Beloved* ; Dorcas the young girl Joe loves and kills is the *Beloved* in this story. She is the thing that both Joe and her wife lack and desire; she is their hope of self-fulfilment. Carolyn M. Jones observes: "Dorcas is the Beloved: the lost and dead parents; the lover who opens up loneliness; and the child that Joe and Violet choose not to have" (1997, 482). History, memory, storytelling are strategies used by Morrison to explore the interior lives that were never expressed, of worlds that were neglected or devalued, repurposing these traces to reconstruct the incomplete or untold truths. In her later novels *Love* (2003) and *Home* (2012) Morrison's engagement with the African American reality takes on a different

turn. In *Love*, Morrison continues with the themes that are present in her earlier work: the location and identity formation of the black American in a predominantly white hegemonic structure, the modes of negotiations adapted by the black women to confront and overcome patriarchy, the probing into the shadows and crevices of history that were neglected or excluded. In *Love* Morrison addresses the twentieth century debates about black families in America, the expropriation of the middle class ideology and the romanticized mythification of the 'happy family' unit. Critics have swooped upon the not so subtle Bill Cosby/ Billy Cosey connection that Morrison invokes and critiques in her characterisation of the idealized and absolute figure of paternal authority in the novel. Mary Paniccia Carden argues, " Her (Morrison's) invocation of Bill Cosby and her character of Bill Cosey suggests that *Love* draws a correspondence between contemporary debate about the nature of the present crisis in African American communities and earlier uplift discourses, both o which join man-making rhetoric with the language of socio-economic hierarchy" (2011, 131). *Love* like most of her novels concern with the role of memory in confronting and healing trauma. The tensions between Heed the night (Cosey's child bride) and Christine (Cosey's granddaughter) remind one of the girlhood solidarities and the grief and trauma of misunderstandings and separation in *Sula*. They were childhood friends, sharing a secret language, until Billy Cosey introduces a rupture between them by his 'adult nasti-

ness'. It is only at the end of the novel that they realize that their animosity issued from their repressed shame and a sense of betrayal triggered by the ambivalent father figure and the illusion of the family romance. Love, like many of Morrison's earlier novels also presents women's friendships as transformative in a repressive and discriminatory society. In her only short story 'Recitatif' (1983), Morrison uses the same trope of female friendship, but complicates the issues of race, class and gender by disrupting the racial markers – in the story, she never specifies which woman is black and which is white. The conscious omission of the racial identities of the two women in the story marks a significant departure in Morrison's artistic vision. Her engagement with contemporary issues such as foster children and gentrification is radicalised by this exclusion since she insists on a realignment of our understanding of gender and class as subject positions. Susana M. Morris argues , " ...'Recitatif' should not be a forgotten part of Morrison's oeuvre , for it engages with many of the same questions and concerns as Morrison's other works, highlighting an author consistently interested in the ways in which women understand their worlds and each other. (2013, 176)

The enigmatic novel *Home* (2012) set in 1950s America in the aftermath of the Korean War traces the twenty four year old war veteran Frank "Smart" Money's search for a 'home' gathering together Morrison's continuous engagement with memory, history and racial identity.

Money's journey to Lotus, Georgia, is not only geographical but psychological and spiritual. It is a journey back to memories which are not entirely without pain in order to overcome a trauma of another kind. Morrison uses the perspective of a marginalised subject to reflect upon an important but often forgotten moment in American history to expose and incorporate the silence and obscurity of lesser known narratives. The multiple connotations of 'home' are ever evolving in Morrison's canon; it is symptomatic of the realities of uprooting and dislocations that is integral to the cultural memory of the African Americans. Because of the forced and voluntary migrations, the ancestral home for the African Americans remain the idealised space of return, safety and renewal. In the rapidly changing psycho-social structures of American society of the 1950s Money's negotiation with the possible meanings of a home, therefore, acquires a nuanced complexity. *Home*, however, offers hope at the end , Money along with her sister Cee revisit the site of their childhood trauma where they had witnessed the burial of the mutilated remains of a victim of lynching. It is an important and significant act since it completes a 'circle of sorrow', suggests continuity and offers a possibility of transcendence.

Morrison has repeatedly debunked the assumptions regarding race, class and gender retained by the privileged discourses. *Race(ing) Justice, En-Gendering Power* (1992), a collection of essays that Morrison edited on the debates

about Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill controversy, addresses the contradictions of the codes that determine the hierarchies of power. For Morrison, race is ubiquitous; it is present even in its absence and invisibility. In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and Literary Imagination* (1992), Morrison underscores the relevance of race to the American canon. In an earlier essay " Unspeakable things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature" (1988) , she had referred to the lurking shadowy Africanist presence that hovers in the American literary tradition, even when there is an attempt on the part of the white writer to obliterate it. Morrison raises the question of authenticity of representation and the author's agency : "What happens to the writerly imagination of a black author who is at some level always conscious of representing one's own race to, or in spite of, a race of readers that understands itself to be 'universal' or race free? In other words, how is 'literary whiteness' and 'literary blackness' made, and what is the consequence of that construction?" (1992, xii- xiii) Morrison's legacy is especially significant in the present times of supremacist narratives, her humanity, the majesty of her vision, her extraordinary courage to fearlessly write truth to power offer us a vision of a regenerative future . She embraced the label of the African American writer not in its narrow and limited scope of representation but as an expanded and nuanced vision of a world from a marginalised, excluded and neglected position of being. The oral quality of Morrison's narratives, the black

cultural idiom she translates in her work and the stories she tells consolidate the assertion she made at the end of her Nobel Acceptance speech: "We die - that may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives" (1993). It would not perhaps be far-fetched to claim that Morrison's voice expressed the conscience of America, the complex history and latent contradictions of the nation were communicated in a language that was neither apologetic nor conciliatory. She remained a political writer grappling with the conflicts that surrounded her but offering a vision of justice, peace, hope and stability. The intimacy she creates in her literary space sets aside any alienating space between the author and the reader. The 'response-ability' on the part of the author, she insists, is predicated on this empathy between the writer and the reader:

> Writing and reading are not all that distinct for a writer. Both exercises require being alert and ready for unaccountable beauty...both require being mindful of the places where imagination sabotages itself, locks its own gates, pollutes its vision. Writing and reading mean being aware of the writer's notions of risk and safety, the serene achievement of, or sweaty fight for, meaning and response-ability.(1992, xi)

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Memory and Strategies of Displacement in Malika Mokeddem, Nina Bouraoui, and Paulina Chiziane's Literature

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> "Rami: Betrayal is a crime, Tony!
> Tony: Betrayal? Don't make me laugh! Purity is masculine, sin is female.
> Only women can betray, men are free, Rami"
> (Chiziane 2016, 38)

In cosmopolitanism as a unity of global differences, women are still considered second-class citizens, as exposed by contemporary African women writers. A deep identity crisis continues to haunt African women at home or as refugees. Nationalism and sexism pose a

critical issue in performing identities in a post-colonial and post-national era: "For nationalists, the nation is the sole criterion of legitimate government and of political community" (Smith 1992, 56).

The following writings truly reflect the dynamics between their authors and their struggle with in-between cultural identities as unique sources to inform and to educate on non-western societies[1] under growing nationalist circumstances. Exploring the socio-political context of these migrant experiences through literature has the potential to reveal a deep understanding of real-life conditions of women in postcolonial Africa. Such details on different female characters by female writers such as Malika Mokkedem, Nina Bouraoui, and Paulina Chiziane, are fictional but essentially born from a collective truth of a much-culturally diversified African population, corroborating traditions with western influences. Colonialism, with its unprecedented economic and social crisis, triggered the cultural redefinition of African women identity. This is often related to political issues, namely the rising of extremist parties as in Mokkedem's rural Algeria, nationalistic views in France and Algeria as in Bouraoui's *Garçon Manqué*, and even resuscitation of ancient practices and superstitions as in the revival of polygamy in Chizanes's *The First Wife*.

Although fictional, these stories prompt the identity as a functional parameter for the validity of the story

that an author builds about her. The narrative identity thesis has been criticized for its incapacity to fully comprehend one's personality on multiple times settings[2] , but it serves as a practical guide for the identity markers that immigrant francophone writers have in common: their resonance with traditions towards which they feel responsible and in debt, their adaptability to a presupposed advanced occidental society, or their power to inspire social debate and political progress towards immigrants' rights beginning with the '50 and '60[3] . Although principles of diversity, polysemy, plurality, and dialogue characterize postcolonial society, it is nonetheless the cultural heritage that brings the light of tolerance in all of the stories. Particularly, literature as memoirs or political essays has an agenda on tolerance and union of cultural diversity between metropolitan France and Algeria or within the same country as in Chiziane's debate on polygamy in Mozambican society.

As noticed by Nina Bouraoui in *Garçon manqué*, the way to multiculturalism has been slow and often difficult to achieve because of the colonial shadow of misrepresentation. At her own arrival in France in the '70, the French were cautious with the Algerians, typically associated with poverty, hunger, war, and desert: "Ce pays, cette terre encore lointaine. Entendre. Tu vis en Alger. Tu as une voiture ? Tu manges à ta faim ? Dans les années soixante-dix, les français ne sont pas encore très habitués aux Algeriens. Aux nouveaux Algériens. Aux mariages mixtes. Aux immigrés. Ils sont encore dans

l'image de la guerre, du désert, du fellagha et des maquis" [This country, this land, still farway. To hear all the time. You live in Alger. Do you have a car? Do you eat as much as you need? In the '70, the French are not yet really used to the Algerians. To the new Algerians. To the mixed marriages. To the immigrants. They still have this image of the war, of the desert, of the insurgents and the maquis] (Bouraoui 2008, 93).

A new literary genre, the refugees' literature, has a clear political and social agenda: to protect the other, often seen as a poor immigrant excluded or never assimilated; to inoculate a sense of community for people with different cultural background living together; to further feminist agenda of African women in life events and education projects. A child of the eighties, refugees' literature presents a genre of disparate personal stories that portray the poor, the immigrant, and the unrecognized as an imperfect person with split or erased national identity[4]. The growing number of young writers to take an active role in producing social change, artistic creativity, and even political capital is encouraging. While the narratives of displacement have already built a frame of reference for this genre, the future resides in exploring the complicated interstices of the new generations' search for inclusive cultural and national identity: "Je porte ma valise à deux mains. Mes affaires de vacances. Ma vie algérienne est repportée. J'aurai toujours une grande valise. Comme tous les Algériens. Comme tous ces étrangers qui descendent du train, du bateau, de l'avi-

on, chargés. Une maison entière dans les mains. […] Un jour, on fouillera ces valises suspectes. On parquera les Algériens au fond des aéroports. Dans un sas spécial. Avec un desk particuliter. Après une forte dérobée. On fouillera, avec des gants, les affaires et les corps de ces hommes, de ces femmes, de ces enfants. Algériens, passagers très dangereux. Ces bombes humaines. Ces gens de la querre. Ces terroristes par leur seul visage, par leur seul prénom, par leur seule destination" [I carry my luggage with both hands. My vacation stuff. My entire Algerian life is on. I will always have a big suitcase. Like all Algerians. Like all these strangers who get off a train, a boat, an airplane, overcharged. With an entire house on their hands. […] One day, we will search these suspected suitcases. We will push the Algerians on the back of the airports. In a special office. With a special desk. After careful surveillance. We will search, with gloves, the things and the bodies of these people, of these women, of these kids. The Algerians, dangerous passengers. These human bombs. The people from the war. These terrorists simply because of their look, of their name, of their destination] (Bouraoui 2008, 100).

As in Bouraoui's case, life in France is not a fairytale. Bouraoui's own experience is relevant[5] . Even if ultimately the franco-algérian writer integrated French society, the beginning of her life in Rennes is a rocky one, as described in *Garçon manqué*. Here the geography of her childhood intimately relates to her blurred nation-

al and gender identities. If Bouraoui identifies with the narrator/character in the story, for Mokeddem, identification is more subtle, inspired by a surprising and unexpected feminist solidarity within a misogynistic Algerian society of the 80' and 90' [6]. Reading these stories, one immediately associates political dissent with blurred gender stereotypes within an already established school of feminists. With the aesthetics revolution of autobiographical writing as well as the emancipated ideas on women comes a sense of powerful advocacy to redefine the genre of displacement literature.

Confused by their dreams of freedom and migration, many of the characters portrayed start to believe in old European values (common linguistic Indo-European linguistic origins, historical memories, or geopolitical frontiers) as *fundamental codes* (Foucault 1966, 13) that reflect a nation's language, technics, and establishments as a live experience. The migrant literature is the place where African women writers start to explore the archaeology of their nations and enabl an active exchange of their cultural production. The design of this mise-en-opposition enabled marginal cultures to receive international attention and to bring rapidly awareness on their specific agenda on gender or cultural identity and social rights. By raising awareness for the coexistence of a diversity of cultures and identities within the same nation, the migrant literature makes clear African women' proximity, as a natural approach to what seems to be marginal and

weak. This exchange of cultural productions happens when there is certain flexibility within the writer herself between the position of the object (the novel) and subject (the reader): "Nul regard n'est stable. Le sujet et l'objet, le spectateur et le modèle inversant leur rôle à l'infini" [No gaze is stable. The subject and the object, the spectator and the model, continuously switch their role] (Foucault 1966, 21).

Historically, Europe has been a place of racial tolerance after World War II, a place where artists from around the world found artistic reclusion and political exile. In this respect France succeeded in creating a prosperous ambient for jazz black singers, Russian dancers, or African writers: "France est l'un des pays où les préjugés de race ont été les moins forts" [France is one of the countries where the stereotypes of race were less powerful] (Noiriel 1988, 337). For France, where the cult of national identity is still considered a guaranty of the state, racial tolerance comes as unexpected. This could be explained within the context of European integration and global economy, and literally translate into equal rights for natives and immigrants[7] . Specifically, for the French this also sub mined the control exercised by the state on questions of national security, language and culture preservation, traditional French identity staples. The so called "threat" posed by outsiders was thus not only economic but also cultural, culminating with a right nationalist discourse. Aggravated by the raise of European

Union, right discourse continues to build its narratives on the perceived disappearance of France as a sovereign state.

Objectively postcolonial French context left exiled writers confused while caught between their native culture and their adoptive French society. Such an example is Malika Mokeddem's *L'interdite* [The cast out]. Back in her Algerian village, Sultana (an alter ego of the writer Mokeddem), is so deeply immersed in her French identity, essentially career oriented, that she does not answer to the Algerian female pattern to the extent that she is not even recognized by her own people. Sultana is born Algerian but her appearance is French. Salah immediately labels Sultana as Occidental: "Même ton silence est calculé, calibré. Un comportement d'Occidentale ! Tu ne sais pas parler comme les vrais Algériens. Nous, on parle pour ne rien dire, on déblatère pour tuer le temps, essayer d'échapper à l'ennui. Pour toi, l'ennui est ailleurs. L'ennui c'est les autres. Tu as des silences suffissantes, des silences de nantie. Des silences pleins de livres, de films, de pensées intélligentes, d'opulence, d'égoisme…" [Even your silence is calculated, calibrated. The attitude of an Occidental Woman! You don't know how to talk like true Algerians do. We, we talk to say nothing, we chat to kill the time, to try and escape the boredom. For you, boredom is elsewhere. Boredom is in the others. You have sufficient silences, silences of the wealthy. Silences full of books, movies, smart ideas, opulence, egoism…]

(Mokeddem 1993, 49). Salah goes further and mentions the Algerian anchored "gangrene of mentalities" that keeps all men stuck in misogyny. Sultana and Salah are coming from a common origin, the modern generation of the '70 Algerian students. Consequently, they find themselves in a time of deceiving modernity and sexual emancipation. An entire generation seems conflicted between keeping their national identity and adopting their French postcolonial path. For this generation's women the tendency to generalize postcolonial way of life dramatizes the road to exile and studies abroad, while men fall in old stereotypes of misogyny and sexual discrimination. The most representative is the mayor of the village, Bakkar, who apostrophes Sultana for being a female doctor doing a male job, thus confronting tradition.

Sultana had no choice but become a doctor and adopt an additional identity, one related to her intellectual career, a phenomenon often observed by sociologists: "we have already seen that, sociologically, human beings have multiple identities, that they can move between them according to context and situation, and that such identities may be concentric rather than conflictual " (Smith 1992, 67)

Among many identity markers, language plays a key role in this transition. A language of conflict and exposure of collaborators and colonials, French is discredited in Algeria. But could the literary classic Arabic, the dialec-

tical Arabic, or the Berber really replace it? The question appears to concern many other writers[8] because French still functions universally, while Maghreb Arabic and Berber language are regarded as unworthy of official business by the Algerians in Mokeddem's story. Within the story Sultana asks this question as one of her generation's issues. A mentor to young Dalila, she encourages her pupil to continue her studies in French, as the only way to resist patriarchal values deeply rooted in their society. Ultimately they realize that it is not the language that brings misfortune but what people do with the language: "Une langue n'est que ce que l'on en fait! En d'autres temps, l'arabe a été la langue du savoir et de la poésie" [A language is what we do of it ! In the past, Arabic was a language of knowledge and poetry] (Mokeddem 1993, 93). The village of Ain Nekhla marginalizes women, under the continuous menace of an extremist nationalist party, the mayor, and the taxi driver Marbah. The two men strategically reinforce a culture of fear and exclusion of progress while proclaiming a fight for patriotic decolonization. Sultana represents a double threat since she has access to the village community by birth, and connection to France by exile. Salah too inspires distress, the only Algerian male in this story with progressive views towards women rights. He advises Sultana to avoid direct confrontation with the local nationalists: "Les femmes, ici, sont toutes des résistantes. Elles savent qu'elles ne peuvent s'attaquer, de front, à une société injuste et monstrueuse dans sa quasi-totalité.

Alors elles ont pris les maquis du savoir, du travail et de l'autonomie financière" [Women, here, are all resistant. They know that they cannot fight openly this society, unjust and monstrous on all its levels. So, they chose the fight through knowledge, work, and financial autonomy] (Mokkedem 1993, 131).

Women do fight back openly when they set on fire the mayor's town hall. They gather around Sultana in whom they see a powerful advocate through her education and financial independence. The relation between female villagers and Sultana is codependent since Sultana too finds comfort in their stories and start confronting the men of the village whom she labels as "frustrated, brainless dicks continuously erected but dissatisfied, with deep hate against women everywhere instilled in their eyes" (Mokeddem 1993, 163).

A similar world of gender transgression is recounted in Paulina Chiziane's *The First Wife - A Tale of Polygamy*. Mozambican women find comfort in each other's confessions in spite of Mozambique's split between the women of the north, more educated and emancipated, and the women of the south, significantly subjected to patriarchal customs and beliefs. In the south, birthplace of Rami [9], men are the gatekeepers of power in the public sphere and at home: "A husband at home means security, protection. Thieves keep away if a husband is present. Men respect each other. […] In a husband's presence, a home is more a home, there's comfort and status" (Chiz-

iane 2016, 12). To exemplify, after a man's accidental death, women in the family are not only disrespected for becoming widows but also accused of killing him, called witches, gold diggers, whores, self-seekers (Chiziane 2016, 11). Betrayed by her husband Tony, Rami turns to her female friends and neighbors who share similar stories of abandonment and jealousy. Many are abandoned after many years of marriage like unwanted baggage, baffled by their husbands' cruelty. Personal and social issues such as polygamy, infidelity, and misogynist claims are aggravated by the financial dependence. In addition, the number of men in the north of Mozambique is decreasing because most of them work abroad in inhuman conditions: one of Rami's aunts takes a second husband because the previous one destroyed his lungs in the South African gold mines. Polygamy could be a necessity as one of the mistresses reveals: "In my village, polygamy is the same as sharing scarce resources, for leaving other women without any cover is a crime that not even God forgives" (Chiziane 2016, 79).

Through Rami's aunt, Maria, the 25th wife of a king, we are introduced to the small economy of a traditional polygamist family: women are treated with respect, each wife has her house and her properties, and they all have duties and rights within the assembly of the king's wives. However, as Rami notices, there is a total lack of love and emotional fulfilment since all of the king's marriages are merely political or financial treaties with different communities and tribes.

Wealth is a measure for human relationships and a barometer for sexual relations in Rami's life. At one point, she notices that all of her husband's mistresses are well kept, have better clothes, and beautiful houses. One of these lovers, Luisa admits that money is the main reason why all of these women hold on to Tony. Men are hunted and used for financial gain; ultimately consumed by their own patriarchal rules.

Rami becomes a repository for domestic and social injustice, a reclusion necessary to heal her own wounds. After consulting a "love counsellor", a sort of marriage counsellor for polygamists, she concludes that lack of education is not the only reason for polygamy. Poverty too is a key element next to other triggers such taboos, myths, and local habits. Popular beliefs deeply rooted in the collective wisdom transform women into servants, generation after generation, blaming women even for natural disasters and diseases.

A frowned upon practice, sustained by traditions and primitive believes, polygamy not only humiliates women but also enslaves them financially. As opposed to Rami, who holds a teaching degree, the rest of the women follow a limited education on how to please a man. Once abandoned by men, women foresee their future in poverty, as noted by Rami: "Things are like this because you don't work. Every day you have to beg for a few crumbs. If each of us had a source of income, a job, we'd be free

of this problem. It's humiliating for a grown woman to have to ask for money for salt and coal" (Chiziane 2016, 169). The very few who dare to accede to financial independence are deeply despised as happened to Rami and one of her husband's wives because of their clothing business in the bazar. In Tony's own words: "Now that you people have got these business ventures, you think you're ladies, but you're no better than whores" (Chiziane 2016, 246).

The market/bazar is an unexpected space of compassion between women trying to liberate themselves, a space to share personal stories of family rape and other domestic violence [10]. To these women, men often condition their economic status and provoke immediate misfortune. Other times their unhappiness is independent of their choices. One of them used to be married with three kids but she lost her husband to economic migration. Another woman has a child from rape during the civil war. Ultimately, Rami realizes that the key is in women initiative to improve their lives and stand up for themselves and their children.

Rami manages to start a business for each of the other wives and they all obtain relative financial independence. Financial success counts also as psychological success for these African women, most of the time uneducated and raised to blindly submit to men. Successful, they manage to stay together in a sisterhood of business part-

nership and family links by learning from each other's experience. Although a teacher by training, Rami learns from Lu the retail business details and discovers that she is more successful in business than in teaching.

Mixing political and economic factors appear initially as a bad decision, but the narrative makes sense once Rami understands that all these factors are related and that she needs to embrace polygamy and officially recognize all the wives and their children [11]. Financial matters are of high importance in polygamy and this is primarily because the wives are regarded as assets. According to old ceremonies of bride price weddings, the wives' income becomes common fortune: the assets, the social security, and the retirement savings. During kutchinga, for example, a ceremony by which a widow is obliged to sexual intercourse with one of her brothers in law, she is treated as inherited propriety. Rami explains how this ceremonial is ultimately related to the bride price paid during the wedding: "Kutchinga is a stamp, the sign of ownership. A woman's bride price is paid in money and cattle. She's property. Whoever invests in her expects something in return, the investment needs to pay" (Chiziane 2016, 311). After Toni passed away, Rami, a widow of the south, is stripped bare of all possessions, including her house, while the other wives do not suffer the same harsh treatment.

Polygamy brings major shifting in women' social and emotional lives: they get to share one husband, waiting

for him for five weeks, and hiding their jealousy. Social status is only gained by marriage and preserved by the very existence of men in their lives. Thus, during a governmental operation in 1983, when around 1000 people were deported from the city to the northern province of Niassa, "all the women who had no husband were arrested and deported to reeducation camps, accused of being prostitutes, vagrants, criminals" (Chiziane 2016, 241).

Male protagonists are also touched by social malaise when women are excluded from the public sphere. Vincent, a Frenchman, walks the street of the nightly Alger emptied of women as if the city has buried them behind its walls: "L'absence totale de celles-ci crée ce sentiment d'irréalité. Je ne m'y ferai jamais ! Préssées, affairées, elles traversent le jour, le temps d'une rue, le temps d'un courage, entre deux bornes d'interdit. Le soir les avale toutes. Des murs de pierre ou de terre, des murs de peurs et de censures les enterrent. Je désespère" [The total absence of women creates this sense of surreal. I will never get used to it! Occupied, hurrying, they cross the day, the time of a street, the time of one's courage, between two interdictions. The night swallows all of them. Walls of rock and dirt, walls of fears and censorship bury them. I panic] (Mokeddem 1993, 64-65).

On his own, Tony in Chiziane's novel, is struck by his family' atrocities towards his wife and admits to the marginalization of women in their society: "What a murder-

ous culture! […] he never knew life was that bad, nor could he have imagined how much women suffered. He had always thought the social structure was harmonious and that traditions were good, but he now understood the cruelties of the system" (Chiziane 2016, 336).

Chiziane's *The Frist Wife* offers one particular case of collective reflection and debate. Although polygamy is quietly accepted as an instilled reality of wealthy men, many of the male protagonists redefine their position on power, life guidance, and women growth. They do that because Rami cannot accept the initiation rites of the north, or the archaic traditions of the bride price in the south, both traditions enabling a culture of humiliation and enslavement of women. She recognizes the power of the many and initiate her family and community transformation: "The bride price in the south and initiation rites in the north are strong, indestructible institutions. They resisted colonialism Christianity and Islam. They resisted revolutionary tyranny. They will always survive. Because they are the essence, the soul of the people. Through them, a nation affirms itself before the world and demonstrates its will to live according to its own ways" (Chiziane 2016, 65-66).

Many times, the character of Rami is making Chiziane's point to strongly battle polygamy as social disease, beyond the individual interests of one woman. Thus, while confronting Luisa, the third of Tony's wives, Rami goes

over her own narrative of insecurity and jealousy and realizes the depth of Luisa's deplorable life who is not socially recognized, continuously at the mercy of the man on whom she and her children depend for money and happiness. Suddenly Luisa' drama seems bigger than Rami's own love troubles[12].

A further conclusion on the social, economic, and political status of these women illustrates the existence of a politically engaged agenda in African women literature. Names such as Assia Djebar (born in 1936), Maryse Condé (born in 1937), Hélène Cixous (born in 1937), Marie NDiaye (born in 1967), or Nina Bouraoui (born in 1967) have been central in understanding the intersection of racial, ethnic, national, and sexual identities. In Nina Bouraoui's story, the main character is a brilliant individual mixing collective identity. The feminine French side (Nina, Yasmina) is seldom opposed to her masculine Algerian identity (Ahmed, Brio): "Non, je ne veux pas me marier. Non, je ne laisserai pas mes cheveux longs. Non, je ne marcherai pas comme une fille. Non, je ne suis pas française. Je deviens algérien" [No, I don't want to get married. No, I will not let my hair long. No, I will not walk like a girl. No, I am not a French girl. I am becoming an Algerian boy] (Bouraoui 2008, 51).

The national and the gender are two different realms which are rooted in secular values and traditions such as religion, ethnic culture, language, common history

and communal memory: "the territorial boundedness of separate cultural populations in their own 'homelands', the shared nature of myths of origin and historical memories of the community, the common bond of a mass, standardized culture, a common territorial division of labor (…) a unified system of common legal rights and duties under common laws and institutions" (Smith 1992, 60). Nina identifies with her father's culture because Algeria, specifically the city of Alger, is the place of her childhood, while France is just an abstract notion: "Je suis habillée pour partir. Un grand voyage. Habillée pour quitter Alger. Pour me quitter. Habillée pour quitter ma vraie vie. Les jeans, les shorts, les maillots en éponge, les claquettes, les cheveux ébouriffés, ça va pour ici. Pas pour la France. Être présentable. Bien coiffée. Faire oublier. Que mon père est algérien. Que je suis d'ici, traversée" [I am dressed to leave. A big journey. Dressed to leave Alger. To leave me behind. Dressed to leave my real life. The jeans, the shorts, the bodysuits in a sponge, the flip-flops, the tousled hair, this is acceptable here. It is not in France. To be presentable. With the hair done. To forget. That my father is Algerian. That I am from here, just brought from France] (Bouraoui 2008, 92).

The character has the same name as the author, but she remains a portrait made up within the narrative. While Nina's story is inconsistent in terms of chronological time and conflict [13], the narrative brings into play the need for coherence and aftermath rethinking of the

original experience as if the author tried to rationalize the past through narration. A strong biographical element continues through the use of the first person[14] although there is a clear boundary between the author (Bouraoui), the narrator (an older Nina), and the main character (the teenager Nina).

As Nina is about to discover, identity formation is a personal ideology that feeds from national and ethnic collective data. Born between two cultures, Nina uses her position as an outsider to observe the opposites and to find a way to reconcile old wounds. In this regard, her name is representative: B-o-u-r-a-o-u-i, literally the father [abi] of the storyteller [raba]. She is destined to speak out for her people on her father's side.

Another conflict in her search for identity is the dichotomy French versus Algerian political agenda. She recognizes the French culture based on a strong territorial concept of nation and citizenship, while the Algerians are still fighting colonial domination. France is a good example of Europe's tendency towards preserving national heritage and values. This tendency has been further developed into extreme security policies, as observed by Nina when passing airport French customs: "Furthermore, violent security policies are being waged in the name of Europe by countries that serve as the main entry points to Fortress Europe – now exacerbated by the conjecture of the 'global war on terror'" (Fricker & Gluhovic 2013, 8).

Malika Mokeddem's narrative also builds a story around another person's reality, while the narrator clearly shares the author's life experience and ideas on ethnic and gender identity. This intentional confusion enables a better understanding of author's psychology and mystics[15] . Like the author Mokeddem, the main character Sultana Medjabed is born in a desert Algerian village and becomes a doctor in Montpellier. Back home to the village of Ain Nekhla, Sultana reflects on how the exile offers the emotional distance to understand her birthplace: "L'exile est l'aire de l'insaisissable, de l'indifférence réfractaire, du regard en déshérence" [the exile is a land of elusiveness, meta-reflection, the wondering gaze] (Mokeddem 1993, 17). Sultana presents herself as a rebel because she does not believe anymore in the patrimony of memories, traditions, and funding mythology, still deeply rooted in the old village[16] .

A different view on this matter brings Vincent, another character in the book. As a French man who receives a kidney transplant from a dead Algerian woman, Vincent resurfaces a strange case of mixed national and sexual identity, much as the one noticed in Bouraoui's story of Nina. By physical association he truly feels a kinship with his donor and travels to Algeria: "Nous sommes un homme et une femme, un Français et une Alférienne, une survie et une mort siamoises" [We are a man and a woman, a French and an Algerian, survival and death twins] (Mokeddem 1993, 31).

Sultana finds in her singularity a weakness that torments her already fragile condition - as a child she witnessed her father killing her mother, her younger sister death, and her father abandonment. After meeting Vincent, she learns from him to look at the past from the outside and to see clearly into her future.

Sultana is not only suffering from her own family drama but she has empathy for all Algerian women submitted to private and public sexual discrimination: "Si l'Algérie s'était véritablement engagée dans la voie du progress, si les dirigeants s'étaient attelés à faire évoluer les mentalities, je me serais sans doute apaisée. L'oubli me serait venu peu à peu. Mais l'actualité du pays et le sort des femmes, ici, me replongent sans cesse dans mes drames passés, m'enchaînent à toutes celles qu'on tyrannise" [If Algeria had genuinely engaged on the path of progress, if governors had started to change the mentalities, I would have undoubtedly found peace. Forgetfulness would have come to me step by step. But the reality of the country and the women' destiny here immerse me continuously in my past dramas, they chain me to all of these women under tyranny] (Mokkedem 1993, 155).

Finding kinship among other women gives a pedagogical sense to their stories for future generations to help them navigate stereotypes and discrimination. This side is particularly expressed in Chitziane's story where women have long discussions about their misfortune. Rami

and the wives are convinced that Mozambican women are real pillars to their nation in educating young women and men: " We shall teach men the beauty of forbidden things: the pleasure of weeping the taste of the wings and feet of the chicken, the beauty of fatherhood, the magic of the rhythm of the pestle as it grinds the grain. Tomorrow, the world will be a more natural place." (Chiziane 2016, 433) Women do not complot against cultural heritage; they simply respond to realities of their time, unfit to ancestors' traditions: "it's very hard to accept polygamy in an age when women are affirming themselves and conquering the world" (Chiziane 2016, 460).

By comparison, it is no accident that Sultana becomes a mentor for the young Dalila, in Mokeddem's narrative. She encourages the young pupil to continue her studies and to build a life independent of her illiterate brothers and father. Dalila's dreams reflect a desire to escape her people' nationalism as well as a powerful tendency towards western, oblivious of the weight of nationalism and traditions in France. Although aware of disadvantages immigrants were facing at the time[17] , Dalila feeds utopian images of France as honorable, powerful, and omniscient.

Looking at this progressive acceptance of ethnic performance and gender identity by young female and male characters, political initiative and social equity appear to be a generational phenomenon. Nina from Bouraoui's

story is continuously revolting by contrast to the peaceful and invisible presence of her parents. She performs cultural differences with such a tenacity as if one generation would catch up with the lack of voice from their predecessors. The same happens to Rami in Chitziane's novel who learns from her mother's silences about her aunt's death at the hand of her husband. Determined to light out the truth she will speak up for the old women. Sultana, who avoids falling on her mother's victimized steps, transcends Mokeddem's view on generational transformation too. It is clear that, beyond its therapeutic power, their literature creates sites of memory meant to educate on heritage; to learn, assess, and criticize it.

Within Chiziane's story *The First Wife*, the readers are familiarized with the artist's ethnic background, with the region's customs, history, cultural traditions, and even geographical details. Rami, raised in the south, is not familiar with the polygamy of the north: "A husband isn't a loaf of bread to be cut with a knife, a slice for each woman. Only Christ's body can be squeezed into drops the size of the world, in order to satisfy all the believers in their communion of blood" (Chiziane 2016, 23). This kind of documentation is highly creative in a story that promises the benefits of tolerance and acceptance.

As a result of these major transformations operated by the literary, these novels function with all the apparatus that engaged literature implies, including the power to exorcize (Artaud 2000, 39) mysterious, latent, altercations,

and old feuds. The public success of Bouraoui, Mokeddem, and Chitziane's stories is explained not only by the appeal of their writing style but also by their characters whose main advocacy comes from cultural heritage towards a redefinition or displacement[18] of old national identities. They voice different minor identities established on their own right and decentralize the assimilative political strategies of French colonial discourse and Algerian/Mozambican discourse of tradition.

Literature has the potential to link people with different national interests, history, and material conditions. In Antonin Artaud's words, culture speaks the language of the soul: "La vraie culture agit par son exaltation et par sa force" [The true culture acts by its exaltation and its force] (Artaud 2000, 16). African women' writing transmits an electrified spectacle of life by which it mirrors a minority's will to change. As proved by the Bouraoui, Mokeddem, and Chiziane's novels, this literature harmonizes the global and the local cultures, and subsequently the family factors and the communitarian identities. If the patriarchal discourse disregarded women by gender principle and the poor women by socio-economic strategy, the oppressed were able in these stories to overcome handicaps and to stand for their rights to build a better life. Education and financial independence changed the terms of real-life conditions for these characters. Moreover, old traditions such as polygamy do not answer to modern times wishes . The strong characters within these

stories reflect a harmonious, inclusive African society in continuous change, more tolerant to all identities: "In the modern era of industrial capitalism and bureaucracy, the number and in particular the scale of possible cultural identities have increased yet again" (Smith 1992, 58).

NOTES:

1. For the readers: "l'auteur se définit comme la personne capable de produire ce discours, et il l'imagine donc à partir de ce qu'elle produit" (the author is defined as the person capable to produce these discourses, and she-the reader- imagines him-the author- starting with what has been written) (Lejeune 1975, 23).

2. Due to the "obligation to consider a human being as a whole […] adequate to the richness and complexity of the human being as a whole" (Batters 2006, 31).

3. In her anthology on The Narrative Mediterranean, Claudia Esposito marks the beginning of the Maghrebi literature in French in the 1950's and 1960's, a time

that coincides with Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria's political independence, when: "numerous writers left the Maghreb for France" (Esposito 2014, XII).

4. During the '90s, France took the first steps towards understanding these millennial African writers and their continuous lack of stability to a certain national identity.

5. Economic dominance, ended up with a massive migratory phenomenon in the recent years, a story that seems to repeat Albert Memmi's prediction on colonialism, only transposed into modern capitalist terms.

6. Another Algerian, Hélène Cixous builds in The Laugh of the Medusa an account for the difficulty to overthrow historical-cultural limits that oppose women to men, or a race to another one.

7. As mentioned by Gordon Philip and Sophie Meunier in Globalization and French Cultural Identity.

8. The language is unstable and volatile in Maghreb mainly because French still dominates the public space: "As the Algerian Italophone writer Tahar Lamri concurs, writing in French affords a larger readership and has the advantage of eliciting debates around the world – including with other Algerians of course" (Esposito 2014, 158).

9. Rami is a modern acronym for Rosa Maria, suggesting the character's tendency towards modernity.

10. Rami acts as a historian and conduct her research not only among her sister wives but women everywhere. One woman from Zambezia has five children mirroring her country's history: the eldest boy is the result of a rape by a Portuguese during the colonial war; her second is a black son from a rape by "the freedom fighters"; another mulatoo comes from the Rhodesian commandos who destroyed the freedom fighters; a fourth son is from the rebels in the civil war; and the fifth, the only one that is the coronation of love and peace with a man that she truly loved.

11. One woman in the market advises her: "keep your money hidden away in a corner. Money in a man's pocket is for all of his women. In a woman's hands, it's bread and food" (Chiziane 2016, 174).

12. Rami imposes on Tony the responsibility for his five women and sixteen children. She invites all of them to his 50th anniversary and has them recognized in front of the entire family and community.

13. "At any rate, we cannot avoid noticing that self-representation takes many non-Narrative forms. Many (writers) see themselves, not in terms of story or plot, but in terms of character, in terms of roles and seek

to be consistent in their display of character" (Batters 2006, 39).

14. In the Autobiographical pact, Philippe Lejeune refers back to Gerard Genette's comments on the autodiegetic narrations: " Mais il (Gerard Genette) distingue fort bien qu'il peut y avoir récit à la prémière personne sans que le narrateur soit la même personne que le personnage principal" [But he distinguishes carefully that it is possible to have a first-person narration without having the narrator identical to the main character] (Lejeune 1975, 16).

15. "confusion sur laquelle est fondée toute la pratique et la problématique de la littérature occidentale depuis la fin du XVIIIème siècle" [confusion on which are founded the entire practice and ideas of the Occidental literature since the end of the eighteenth century] (Lejeune 1975, 33).

16. She feels the displacement because a nation, as defined by Renan ("What is a nation?), is a community united around the will to share and to continue these traditions.

17. Immigrants nowadays radically contest nationalistic values that are traditionally based on ethnic origins, culture and language, patriotism, and other common national interests. Such nationalistic criteria are obsolete in the light of post-industrial society and cosmopolitan culture (Smith 1992, 63-65).

18. By national displacement this study understands one's identity in a context of rupture from a certain nation and culture under the pressure of political and social urgencies of assimilation by European cultures.

19. Change comes inevitably form the socio-economical terms: "Often steeped in mystery, roots and rites are secondary to what exists in the present and in the material world" (Esposito 2014, 22).

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Picturing That Which Has Not Been Imaged: The Photograph Upended in Owanto's "La Jeune Fille à la Fleur" Series

Emily Shoyer

The Problem of Photography: Gender, Trauma and Mimetic Representation

Photography is intimately connected to memory and violence. Despite perceptions of the photograph as a reflection of reality, it is mediated and can easily, through framing and authorial intentionality, slip into the fictional or instrumental. As Karina Eileraas argues, the image is not just a product of mechanical reproduction, "but also of a dynamic field of aesthetic and social relations and contestations" (Eileraas, "Reframing the Colonial Gaze: Photography, Ownership, and Feminist Resistance,"

2003, 810). This paper addresses the necessarily wary, yet poignant representational strategy accomplished by French and Gabonese lens-based artist Owanto (b.1953, France) in her *La Jeune Fille à la Fleur* series (2015). It argues that Owanto re-presents colonial photography in order to raise awareness of the trauma of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) while also recognizing its inherent incomprehensibility. It queries previous accounts of activist art with a specific focus on lens-based installation art by diasporic women artists of African descent through an analysis of Owanto's artwork and its negotiation of photographic and trauma theory.

Numerous scholars have debated the slippery, problematic and violent nature of the medium. (See Gonzalez, "Morphologies: Race as a Visual Technology," 2003 and Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," 1986) Simultaneously evidentiary and subjective, intimate and violating, de-subjectifying and heroizing – the photograph is a paradox. Photographers from the 1970s until the present day, such as Hannah Wilke, Zanele Muholi and Yael Bartana, have chosen to reinterpret the medium to address this very paradox through their artwork. While Wilke empowers her body by unveiling it in precarious positions to the camera, Muholi focuses on marginalized subjects and Bartana invents politically para-fictional landscapes. These three women use the medium to challenge its historically painful legacies through distinct artistic strategies. Deploying photography to subvert its

very history and essence continues to be a successful strategy within feminist, diasporic and activist art. This can be seen in Carrie Mae Weems' (b. 1953, Portland, OR) 1995-1996 series *From Here I Saw What Happened, and I Cried*, in which she appropriates and edits nineteenth century photographs of enslaved African Americans with provocative captions and tonalities.

Following in this lineage, and yet taking it a step further, Owanto utilizes photographic portraiture as source material to address the effects of FGM. Her mother was Gabonese and she spent time with her maternal side in Libreville as a child. In 2009 she represented Gabon at the 53rd Venice Biennale, however, she was born in Paris. (Owanto, "The Forgotten Drawer," 2018). In La Jeune Fille à la Fleur she re-appropriates colonial photographs from a family photo album of women engaged in ceremony and revealing their circumcisions. The artist also affixes a hand-crafted sculptural element to the photographic image, filling the void of the wounded genitalia with a flower. Despite the fact that Owanto must be wary of re-violating her subjects due to the nature of the photographic image, she mobilizes the medium precisely because, and in spite of, its invasive exposure.

As literary scholar Marianne Hirsch writes, "reading and [remaking] can be seen as forms of feminist resistance" (Hirsch: 1997, 215). Through her rupture of photographic representations of the black female body with sculptural components, she reproduces the "punctum",

or the details within the image which reach out from their photographic sources and prick, wound or bruise their audience's subjectivity. (See Barthes, Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography, 1981). In revealing her affected subject position in relation to the photographs she mobilizes, Owanto rejects the notion of the photograph as an objective document. She does, however, activate the tension between the real referent of the violence and trauma of FGM preserved within the image, and therefore its testimonial effect, and her subjective meditations on the practice. In this way her work is liminal between the personal and the political, merging the inherent theatricality, or intentionality, of both art and activism.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines FGM as, "procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons". (Nnamuchi 2012. 91) The WHO also estimates that between 100 and 140 million women have undergone the procedure globally. (Nnamuchi: 2012, 91) On her website, Owanto writes, "Often done in discreet initiation ceremonies around the world, FGM/C is an age-old ritual that has been used to signify the important transition from childhood to womanhood by curbing sexual desire" (2018). There are many women who live with FGM, scholars and activists who argue against European or American intervention against FGM. FGM is an endlessly nuanced postcolonial and diasporic issue at the core of which is

a larger questioning about the evolution of tradition, culture and morality and who gets to dictate their practice. As the following pages are focused on Owanto's perspective on FGM, information about the practice will only be provided when it concerns the works of art under consideration. Readers looking for more information should consult Obioma Nnaemeka's *Female Circumcision and the Politics of Knowledge: African Women in Imperialist Discourse* (2005) and Saida Hodžić's *The Twilight of Cutting: African Activism After NGOs* (2017).

In order to picture the reality of FGM, Owanto explicitly depicts the female body laid bare. In this way, she participates in feminist interventions within art history to represent and de-objectify the vagina. With a few exceptions such as the Venus of Willendorf and other similar figurines, vaginal iconography in art history is rare. Most representations of the female body throughout history either do not explicitly represent female genitalia or feature women covering that region of the body to imbue their figures with a sense of sexual intrigue. In all of this imagery, the exterior of the female body is objectified for the purposes of sexual desire while female genitalia is deemed too obscene to be directly depicted. (Nead 1992, 65) The vagina was a taboo subject for centuries and despite a few instances of male artists representing female genitalia, usually for sexually instrumental purposes such as Gustave Courbet's *L'Origine du Monde* (1856), it was not valued as a representational form by female artists until the 1970s.

In the 1970s the "our bodies ourselves" movement inspired a reclamation by women artists who began to draw on the forms of female genitalia to create work (Nead 1992, 65). This was a political statement by artists such as Judy Chicago, Carolee Schneemann and Hannah Wilke to gain visibility for the vulva where it was traditionally denied. This type of women's body art such as Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (1974-79) or Wilke's *Sweet Sixteen* (1977), "reveals the interior, the terrifying secret that is hidden within this idealized exterior" in Lynda Nead's words (Nead 1992, 66). Owanto's choice to conceal the vulva cannot be easily condemned as anti-feminist. In fact, many female artists in the 1970s rejected vulvic representation because they felt it reduced women to a biological form. They claimed that these representations participated in the perception of the woman's role as biologically determined, something the women's movement was attempting to refute. Owanto's desire to protect the genitalia of the women pictured in her photographic sources can also be defined as a feminist gesture, particularly since they are colonial nudes.

Questioning the efficacy of making and re-making representations of the vagina inherently considers the gaze at play. While the vaginal interior was aesthetically mystified by the male gaze for centuries due to its "vulgarity", in the twenty-first century it has been demystified, though certainly still de-subjectified, through the lens of the pornographic gaze. The persistent and pervasive pornographic gaze objectifies representations of the

vagina for sexual gratification. (See Fokt, "Pornographic Art and the Aesthetics of Pornography," 2015 and McKee, "The Objectification of Women in Mainstream Pornographic Videos in Australia," 2005). In the West, FGM has been framed through the lens of the medical gaze which initiates a different kind of desubjectification in that the doctor separates the patient's body from her identity and subjective psychology (See Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, 1975). Owanto chooses to protect the visualization of her subject's interior wounds to combat and negotiate the various gazes at play. In so doing she participates within a lineage of artists claiming political autonomy for the female body from the honorific, caring angle of the female gaze, to address and picture this specific form of gender-based violence and discrimination. In covering her subject's genitalia, Owanto is also protecting its fetishization as an aesthetically erotic form.

It is essential to highlight that most of the artists in the 1970s thinking about vulvic representation were white women artists. Women of color were alienated from the "women's movement" because white feminists put an emphasis on gender rather than race and class. As Winifred Breines writes, because of their "white, middle-class privilege, the account goes, most early feminists, even those who were radical, socialist, and dissenters from the status quo, created a feminism in which black women…were unwelcome and uncomfortable" (Breines 2007, 18). That said, there were black female artists

working at the time such as Betye Saar and Senga Nengudi whose artwork addressed gender-based oppression through the lens of race, if without direct representation of the vulva. In the wake of their initial efforts, artists in the twenty-first century such as Zanele Muholi and Mickalene Thomas have begun to take agency by more directly visualizing the black female body laid bare.

Thomas most explicitly responds to Courbet's *L'Origine du Monde* through her work *Origin of the Universe 1* (2012) As a black, queer artist Thomas re-envisions Courbet's scene by depicting a black woman's genitalia from the same vantage point, drastically shifting the gaze. Muholi has also photographed many black women nude and in particular focuses on members of the LGBTQ community in South Africa due to their marginalized position in society. Both Thomas and Muholi have taken major steps to expand the visual strategies surrounding feminist depictions of black women despite the complex history of representations of the black female nude. Between 1810 and 1815, Saartjie (or Sarah) Baartman from the Cape of Good Hope toured Britain and Paris where her body was both sexualized and racialized and described as "monstrously swollen" and "repulsive." (Wright, "The Face of Saartjie Baartman: Rowlandson, Race, and the 'Hottentot Venus,'" 116-117). From the colonial nudes circulated as fetishized objects to Baartman's story, one can understand why black artists concerned with feminist issues might have avoided depicting the black

female body nude. Weems points to this history quite explicitly in "& A Photographic Subject". She covers the original image, picturing an African American woman with her breasts bare, with a red veil of color and inserts the phrase "& A Photographic Subject" over her body to convey how this woman was sexualized, typified and de-subjectified by the photograph in her time. While she leaves the woman's body bare, she does so not to re-violate her but rather to highlight the violence of the original image-maker. Thomas, Muholi and Weems all demonstrate the power and necessity of visualizing the black female body nude in particular contexts. As FGM is explicitly concerned with the perception and visualization of women's bodies, Owanto must negotiate how and why to represent its raw physical reality, particularly as it has never been aesthetically rendered before.

Owanto: Filling the Void

When Owanto first discovered small celluloid photographs of young women engaging in coming of age ceremonies and undergoing FGM in a family photo album, she quickly returned the images to a drawer and shut them away. The album was among her father's belongings and she presumes the images were taken by a western photographer in the mid twentieth century in what was then termed Afrique Equatoriale Française, the collective French colonial territories in central Africa between 1910 and 1959. As she describes it, "My

first reaction was to quickly put them back in… something I call 'the forgotten drawer' – as I didn't want to be upset, and I didn't want to process the pain I saw in those photographs" (Owanto, "The Forgotten Drawer," 2018). Unable to truly forget the details in the colonial photographs which to her indexed trauma and pain, the artist returned to the drawer just days later. Rather than repress that which upset her within the images, Owanto decided to confront it directly through an artistic project.

She began by digitally enlarging the images to up to ten feet tall. Subsequently she printed them on aluminum panels to, as she describes it, "create a kind of a contemporary feel, because FGM/C is a very contemporary subject" (Owanto, "The Forgotten Drawer," 2018). More than just contemporary, aluminum as a material is cold and hard. It can evoke the texture of the medical examination room or the sharp nature of industrial architecture. Fierce and commanding, in their printing on aluminum and through their exaggerated scale, these images have morphed beyond the soft, malleable and weathered paper photograph in a family photo album. In this way they cannot be handled, overpowered or flipped past with amnesiac abandon. Once enlarged on aluminum, she created a hole in either the site of the wound or in the actual faces of the women pictured. While two of the six images within the series feature young women in ceremony displaying their genitalia, the

other four images depict women engaged in the celebration that precede the actual cutting. Owanto defines this distinction as the contrast between "the joy and the pain. The before and the after" (Owanto, email dated January 29, 2019 to Emily Shoyer). Following the creation of the hole, the artist crafts a flower by hand from corn and glue, petal by petal and places the flower in the hole to fill the void. She chose the flower due to its poetic associations with a young woman's sexual innocence or virginity and envisions it playing a healing role as a vehicle for concealment like a shield or mask. In the artist's words, the flower transforms her subjects "from victims to heroines" in that their genitalia or identities do not become the primary focus – they can take on a persona beyond their trauma (Owanto, "The Forgotten Drawer," 2018).

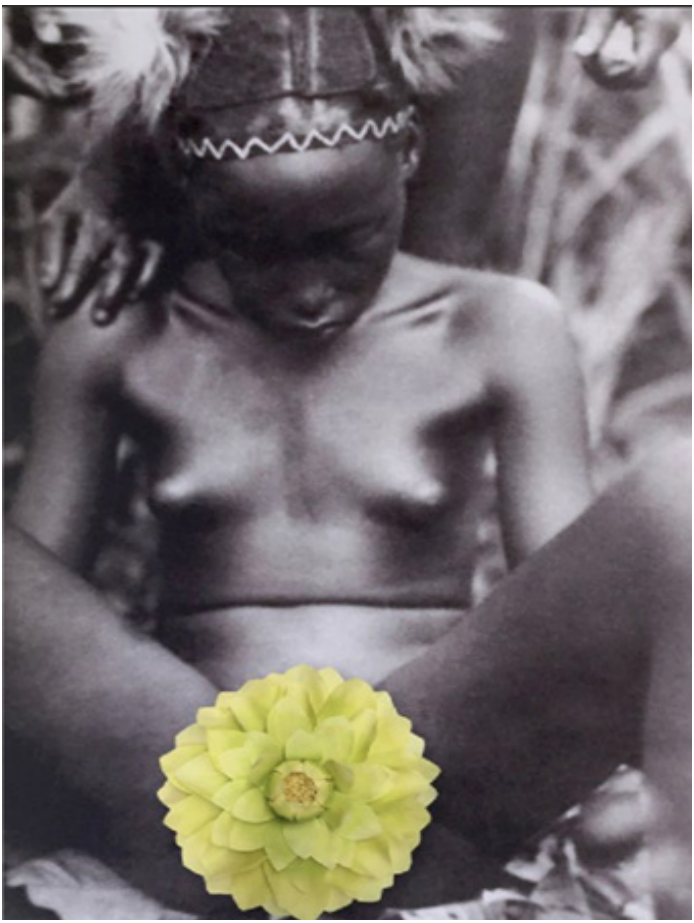

Figure 1. Owanto, Flowers II from *La Jeune Fille à La Fleur,* 2017. Cold porcelain flower on aluminum UV print, 200 x 288 cm. Permanent Collection of the Zeitz MOCAA. Image courtesy of the artist.

Owanto began the series *La Jeune Fille à La Fleur* in 2015. In early 2019, she displayed the works in two major exhibitions titled "One Thousand Voices" at the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa (Zeitz MOCAA) in Cape Town, the largest major museum for contemporary African art in the continent, and later at the Museum of African Contemporary Art Al Maaden (MACAAL) in Marrakech ("Owanto: One Thousand Voices," *Contemporary And*, 2019). The first work in the series, *Flowers II*, is one of the more explicit as the central female figure is entirely nude with her legs splayed open (fig. 1). She gazes down intently towards her genitalia wherein Owanto has placed a bright greenish-yellow flower. Transferring it to a large-scale format, and giving it depth through its printing on aluminum, enables the viewer to find a number of striking details within the image. The central female figure, who cannot be older than twelve or thirteen, takes up the majority of the composition. On closer inspection, a slightly weathered hand reaches from beyond the frame and rests on the young girl's shoulder pressing ever so slightly into her skin, as if holding her in place. The gesture could be comforting but it also might be constraining. Though this may not have been the photographer's intention, they have captured a key element of female genital mutilation/cutting rituals. Most often FGM is performed by traditional practitioners who are older women (Simpson, Robinson, Creighton, and Hodes: 2012, 38). Usually, the practice is requested by the girl's mother, grandmother or other elder female rel-

atives and they hold her down as the ritual is performed. The hand in Owanto's piece recalls this painful aspect of the practice as it haunts from beyond the image.

If the hand in *Flowers II* indexes this traumatic aspect of FGM, *Flowers III* invokes it more directly. *Flowers III* features a young girl with her legs spread open similar to the young girl in *Flowers II* (fig. 2). Behind her, an older woman clasps the younger girl's knees aiding her in pushing her legs open. She gazes at the young girl, while the young girl looks at her genitalia. Owanto fills the location of the mutilated vulva with a large pink flower, and creates a greenish haze around the image, so that the young girl's body is the central focus. This reveals another component of the artist's process: Owanto adds what she identifies as digital veils of color to mediate the harshness of the image. In creating these, the artist enables the viewers to maintain their gaze despite the difficulty of doing so and reveals the image as mediated by her, in place of a mere mimetic representation of violence or suffering. Certainly, the images testify to the fact that these unnamed women underwent a painful experience. The images do not however represent that pain or trauma entirely. This is precisely because the subjective extremity of the trauma and pain of FGM cannot be represented. A photograph can never capture or truly evoke the physical pain of FGM or the psychological impact it may have had on these women after-the-fact. Their lives and their subjective pain cannot ever be

known, the colonial archive precludes their autonomous voices, and this unspeakability is performed in Owanto's installations.

Literary and psychoanalytic theorist Cathy Caruth explains that "the term trauma is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind" (Caruth 1996, 3). Since trauma is defined as an event involving such an extreme amount of stimuli that it is too powerful to be cognitively engaged with, the victim of trauma lives it after-the-fact in the mind (La Planche and Pontalis 1993). A number of problems arises due to this experiencing of trauma after-the-fact in the mind. Caruth explains that "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely not known in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on" (Caruth 1996, 4). Through the haziness of Owanto's images, she recalls this unknowable, unpresentable nature of trauma.

Figure 2. Owanto, Flowers III from *La Jeune Fille à La Fleur*, 2017. Cold porcelain flower on aluminum UV print, 89 x 125 cm. Image courtesy of the artist.

The other works in the series such as *Flowers IV* and *Flowers VI* feature images taken during the celebration that would have occurred prior to the ritual itself. Therefore, they do not feature the more graphic image of a young girl with her legs wide open. In *Flowers IV*, twelve women stand in a line in the same garments, presumably engaging in a ritual. Owanto has covered almost all of their visible faces except for two. *Flowers VI* portrays a young woman standing in the center of an image in ritualistic garb. (fig. 3) Owanto has obscured most of the image with a yellow veil and covered the young woman's face with a yellow flower. Despite the artist's association of these images with the trauma of FGM, the violence of these images lies most meaningfully in that their original source remains the colonial gaze. The Western photographer who took this image would have been intruding on a private, traditional moment and they have captured these women through the lens of a fetishizing colonial morality. Through Owanto's re-publishing of these images she addresses and reframes not just the violence and pain of FGM, but also the oversexualizing, exploitative colonial gaze. In covering the faces and therefore identities of each woman in the images of "celebration" and the exposed genitalia in "ceremony", she protects their subjectivities and, through the flower, attempts to imbue them with a sense of the agency deprived through both FGM and colonial exploitation. In this way she also reinvents the register of significance existent in the symbol of the flower, exceeding innocence in order to project agency.

Figure 3. Owanto, Flowers VI from *La Jeune Fille à La Fleur*, 2017. Cold porcelain flower on aluminum UV print, 125 x 89 cm. Image courtesy of the artist.

Addressing the Nature of the Photographic Image

In its existence at the intersection of aesthetic and social relations, photography has been connected to violence

since its invention in the nineteenth century. The very colonial photographs that Owanto discovered in her family's album were so violent to her that she tried to repress them entirely. Many types of photographs of colonies in Africa were circulated widely and spread problematic and inaccurate narratives about colonial subjects. In this context, photography was a means to document, grid and demean certain "types." (Geary 2008, 143). The perception of the photograph as a factual, scientific document led to dangerous misperceptions of colonial and other alienated subjects (Sekula 1986). This is partially due to the fact that despite European consumers' perception of the photograph as a scientific document, the image turned the individuals it represented into objects filtered through the colonial gaze. Owanto appropriates a specific type of ethnographic colonial nude, those featuring nude African women engaged in either traditional or newly reformed Europeanized activities. These were constructed, as Christraud Geary writes, "through the lenses of both African and foreign photographers" (Geary 2008, 147-8). The images depicting African women in exoticized activities turn these women into objects to be digested and consumed, and therefore strange and demeaning in their representation to a European audience.

Put simply, as Prita Meier writes, "Of course, all photographs are in a sense reductive, turning people, their bodies, and their experiences into static representations"

(Meier 2019, 48). This transformation of people into static representations is a type of de-subjectification. The individuals within the photograph become aestheticized, able to be perceived and consumed as forms rather than humans. If the very aesthetic of the photograph is connected to violence through its de-subjectification of the imaged subject, it is also connected to violence through its status as an emanation of something past, or as Roland Barthes describes it, "that-has-been." (Smith 2013, 102). This is because anything "that-has-been" has been lost. The photograph captures an expired moment and often subjects who have expired or eventually will expire themselves.

Countless scholars have reframed and mobilized Barthes' theories on photography. This is because Barthes was really the first to write about the way photographs are entangled with trauma, affect and emotion. In his final book, published in the 1980 volume *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Barthes looked at images and described the unexpected ways in which they made him feel something. In the introduction to their edited volume *Feeling Photography,* Elspeth H. Brown and Thy Phu claim that the focus on feeling is a queer exercise in contrast to straightforward theories of photography, such as those espoused by Charles Baudelaire who saw the photograph as a machine of representational exactitude, or Walter Benjamin who favored the photograph's reproducibility, centered on "thinking." (Elkins 2013,

10-12). They argue that finding feeling in photography enables us to look at marginalized subjects as they are often "conspicuously absent" from thinking-focused writing about photography. Barthes identifies *punctum* as the emotive, affective quality of the photograph in *Camera Lucida*. It is *punctum* which enables Owanto to picture, in Brown and Phu's words, "all that gets left out of photography's unfolding story" (Brown and Phu 2014, 5).

Barthes argues that there are two types of viewing of photographs. For him, studium is a studied, distanced viewing of a photographic image; it is liking rather than loving. The studium occurs when the viewer recognizes what the photographer intended them to encounter and understands that intention. The studium is a culturally prescribed knowledge, one that is shaped by prior training. In contrast, punctum is a viewer's extremely personal response to certain details in an image. For Barthes it is "this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow and pierces me" (Fried 2005, 542). Punctum is sudden and violent, it "pricks," "wounds" or "bruises" the viewer's subjectivity without warning. Shawn Michelle Smith has emphasized how punctum is a prick, a cut or as she writes, a "penetrating hole made visible by the camera" (Smith 2013, 34). In its very nature, punctum is connected to physical trauma.

The bodied, affective intentionality of punctum helps us locate feeling in images. Part of the power of the

image in eliciting punctum lies in the comparative frame it invokes in terms of tense, it testifies to a moment that is past while also manifesting its subject within the time and space of the viewer (Smith 2013, 108). In this way, the referent still maintains a powerful presence despite the medium's historical tendency towards its de-subjectification. While punctum is about the viewing subject, its experience occurs due to the image's referent. The referent's affective potential propels it into the viewer's present, wounding them and in so doing, maintaining a position of power. Smith has been interested in the ways in which artists have forecast their own feelings, or experiences of punctum, within their practice of photography. In that punctum is a bodied experience of wounding, it is profoundly meaningful that Owanto experienced it in relation to FGM's traumatized photographic archive.

The Operation of Punctum

In order to comprehend how Owanto foregrounds punctum, we must consider the moment in which she first interacted with the photographic sources of her final works. Something occurred during Owanto's perusal of a family photo album to cause her to shut the album and attempt to repress the details within its imagery. These details wounded her enough for her to want to forget them. While we do not know precisely what these details were, the artist has articulated a distinction between what these photographs captured "on the

surface" and the side she saw which was "mostly pain" (Owanto, "The Forgotten Drawer," 2018). In this way she defines the difference between what is shown versus what she sees. In other words, she projects Barthes' theorized distinction between studium and punctum. It is her experience of punctum, due to the affecting violence and pain involved on multiple levels in the original celluloid images, which moved the artist to manipulate them and in so doing rupture their very status as photographs. Through an aesthetic analysis of her sculptural interventions, we can begin to comprehend the details which might have pricked her.

Her first intervention into the photographic composition was to digitally enlarge the images. When one looks at small images in a photo album, each image becomes but one of many nostalgic objects amidst a collection that is owned and therefore easily mastered or shut away. Once converted to such a large scale, these images overwhelm their viewer and take on the status of singular objects. In rejecting the original scale of the imagery, Owanto denies the violent imposition of the colonial gaze which aims to overpower, own and belittle the subjects of these images. At the same time, she must be wary of the voyeurism possible in transferring these colonial nudes to a large-scale format. In an attempt to avoid such voyeurism, in Flowers II and III the artist eliminates the visual of the mutilated genitalia through the hole she crafts. In Smith's terms, punctum is itself a

penetrating hole. By creating her own penetrating hole within the image, Owanto has aesthetically acted out her experience of punctum in the precise site of the composition which elicited it. These voids index the affective quality that the picture of the wounded vulva had for the artist. To Owanto, this visual was a violation, a wounding experience. Rather than leaving the void empty, and therefore leaving the pain and trauma abruptly indexed, she needed to heal the pain.

In crafting and placing a flower within the void, the artist references the cliched notion of "deflowering" as a way of depriving a woman of virginity. Here she appropriates the term in order to imply that FGM is a way of depriving young women of control over their own genitalia. The sculptural flower therefore becomes a gesture of her healing and returning that which was taken from the young women represented. In this way she is both showing us how the image punctured her subjectivity and operating through an aesthetics of care. The flower is her reaching out, gesturing to create an interpersonal relationship with the subject of the photograph. This gesture relocates the young woman from a de-subjectified static representation and brings her into an active and affective present dialogue.

Owanto rejects the documentary nature of photography by sculpting her subjective experiences of punctum onto the image's surface, while still indexing a past

traumatic event. Interestingly, uncontextualized details within Owanto's works are still evident. For example, in *Flowers VI*, the yellowish haze has not entirely eliminated the potential affect of the young women depicted to the right of the central figure. The intensity of the gaze of the young woman to the farthest on the right reaches out from the yellow haze, retaining its power to hold the viewer's attention. In *Flowers III*, the older woman to the right of the young woman beneath the green haze is still visible and her role in the ceremony, or another visual detail, could still prick or wound a viewer. It is true that a viewer might respond subjectively to these specific details in the images.

Michael Fried writes, "The punctum, we might say, is seen by Barthes but not because it has been shown to him by the photographer" (Fried 2005, 546). Fried argues that punctum cannot be prescribed by the photographer because it is by nature spontaneous, personal and unique to the individual. By his logic, punctum is not, and can never be, the viewing experience desired or intended by the maker. Punctum is antitheatrical in nature, a function of being situated in the photograph rather than art. Art objects such as paintings and sculpture generally consider the beholder in a different way than the photograph. The photograph can include details which the photographer did not intend to be there, and as a result can produce unintended effects. In contrast, art objects such as those produced by Owanto are entirely constructed, each facet of the composition is intentional

and produced to create specific relations with the beholder. Certainly, the power of punctum lies in its unpredictability, and yet Owanto has aesthetically demonstrated how its very unpredictability can be mobilized to create work for intentional outcomes, in her case to produce an activist viewer.

In Conclusion: The Intersection of the Personal and the Political Gaze

Activist art inherently considers the beholder in that it is concerned with educating, raising awareness and inspiring social transformation in a collective rather than a singular individual. Therefore, despite her personal experience of punctum, Owanto cannot recreate that experience for her viewers solely by presenting them with the original photographic sources. She could never know that the exact effect she desires would be accomplished because punctum is unknowable in advance. This is precisely why she mobilizes a personal punctum in order to create an art object that in its activist intentions inherently considers the beholder and is therefore the performance of a desired effect. Most remarkably, she has transformed a subjective experience into something public and transmissible. This is a departure from previous accounts on activist art.

In her 1984 essay "Activating Activist Art", Lucy Lippard writes, "photography is a major component of social-change culture." (Lippard 1984, 11). In the essay,

she goes on to argue that the absence of a photographic practice in Ireland contributed to the absence of activist art overall in the country. This is because photography manifests a "truth-effect" or an evidentiary quality which activist artists must capitalize on to argue for the reality and importance of their cause. Owanto obscures that "truth-effect" of the photograph. In her aesthetic, one of subjective experience and care, she is mobilizing both the testimonial quality of the photographic image and the performativity of the art object to inspire a desired viewing experience. Precisely due to the paradoxical status of the photographic image, she is able to appropriate it, activating aspects of its nature such as a personal elicitation of punctum and its testimony to a past event, while also subverting its inherent violence and voyeurism through sculpture to transmit her punctum and affect the public.

If as many feminist scholars have asserted, "the personal is political", Owanto has explicitly aesthetically asserted that connection in utilizing what Barthes identifies as the most personal theoretical operation in photography, the punctum, to educate the public about FGM and attempt to eradicate the practice (Smith 2013, 98). She is concerned with more than just inspiring feelings of empathy or compassion. Her works ask for the active participation of the viewer who must do the work of discerning its affective intentionality. Ariella Azoulay argues that there are more politically expedient feelings

than compassion or sympathy. She theorizes that a photograph's goal must be to activate a "civic gaze", one which looks from a public space of interrelationality. (Azoulay, The Civil Contract of Photography, 2008) She writes, "When and where the subject of the photograph is a person who has suffered some form of injury, a viewing of the photograph that reconstructs the photographic situation and allows a reading of the injury inflicted upon others becomes a civic skill, not an exercise in aesthetic appreciation" (Azoulay 2008, 14).

Owanto however, offers her viewers a unique opportunity for an aesthetic appreciation which lends itself to a civic gaze. In parsing the aesthetic facets of each piece in the series, each viewer discerns the details about the original photographic sources which affected and wounded the artist. The concealment of the genitalia with a flower in Flowers II reveals Owanto's disturbance in response to the visualization of the wound. An appreciation of these aesthetic differentiations leads to an understanding of the humanity and pain invoked by this practice, and the ways in which we are all implicated in it. This is the space of the civic gaze.

In considering her perspective against FGM, it is important to situate the site from which Owanto speaks. It is difficult to do this since her maternal side is Gabonese, and her paternal side is French and therefore she cannot be located through fixed notions of ethnic, national

or geographic identity. *La Jeune Fille à la Fleur* has been displayed in Europe and Africa. Despite Owant's status as an artist of the African diaspora, she is still speaking largely from the West. Many gender studies scholars are highly critical of anti-FGM campaigns from the West, even by women of color or African descent. In Signe Arnfred's introduction to *Re-Thinking Sexualities in Africa*, she articulates the dangers of falling into "dark continent discourse" in which all traditional practices, such as FGM, on the continent are conceived as "savage" or "backwards." (Arnfred 2005, 10-11). Practices like FGM can be used as a foil to revalorize Western morality. Moreover, as Ifi Amadiume and Oyeronke Oyewumi assert, portraying African women as victims legitimizes Western efforts to come to their rescue. (Arnfred: 2005, 12). In this way certain activists working against FGM from the West can be interpreted as re-working a colonial/missionary trope. Obioma Nnaemeka asks, why are Western feminists becoming interested in the issue without ever having had a conversation with a circumcised woman? (Nnaemeka 2005, 4).

Owanto is not circumcised. That being said she has certainly had many conversations with circumcised women. As an extension of the Fleurs series, the artist collected stories and voice recordings of women around the globe via Whatsapp sharing their personal experiences with FGM. These recordings resulted in a sound installation titled *One Thousand Voice* (2018) which was displayed

alongside the *La Jeune Fille à la Fleur* works at the Zeitz MoCAA and MACAAL. Owanto describes her intentions for the piece to aid in giving voice to "the girls who continue to have no say over their own bodies, and calls upon communities to adopt an alternative celebration, an alternative rite of passage devoid of cutting" (Berger 2018). She does not ask communities to cease practicing a meaningful ritual, but rather hopes that they can conceive of alternative options so as to both protect their cultural heritage and women's autonomy.

One Thousand Voices provides the historical images with a more powerful contemporary, personal presence in the form of traumatic memory. Owanto was compelled to supplement her lens-based works with the written or aural word as still images are inherently static. Trauma despite its inability to be entirely experienced, and therefore entirely testified to, requires a telling for it to be worked through. As Ernst Van Alphen describes, testimony is favored in the context of trauma because it is associated with objective representation (Van Alphen 1997, 24). Since her artwork is imbued with her subjective stake, including the aural and written testimony, it connects the project with the personal reality of each woman's lived FGM experience. As Owanto writes, "I have always been interested in linking the past with the present in order to build the future" (Owanto, email dated January 29, 2019 to Emily Shoyer). Rather than demonizing the traditional practice because it is beyond a

Western zone of comprehension, Owanto has specific goals in sight. She is also concerned with empowering women through her representations, rather than typifying them as abject, solely victimized bodies.

The fact that Owanto chose to manipulate the photographic medium into wary lens-based representations is meaningful. Other artists have attempted to address FGM. Many of these projects such as Alice Walker's 1993 book *Warrior Marks: Female Genital Mutilation and the Sexual Blinding of Women* and the documentary of the same title are intended as solely educational and therefore are presented as objective projects. Walker's project has faced particularly strong criticism from post-colonial gender studies scholars precisely because of its moralizing nature. The very wariness of Owanto's visualization of FGM is essential in that it is more nuanced and therefore more ethical. It is essential to note that artist Aida Silvestri (b. 1978, Eritrea) has also accomplished a nuanced representation of FGM as a survivor herself working in contemporary photography. A longer version of this paper considers both her project *Unsterile Clinic* (2016) and *La Jeune Fille a La Fleur* in tandem, however this shorter presentation focuses solely on Owanto's work to highlight its connection to colonial imagery.

To ethically represent an issue like FGM, which is a post-colonial and feminist conversation that predominantly affects women of color, Owanto had to be care-

ful. Through her intentional, nuanced mobilization of the photographic image, she retains the socially transformative nature of the medium, while also preventing the works from de-subjectifying the subject of FGM or the black female body. In transforming her photographic sources into mixed-media art objects, she also capitalizes on a necessary theatricality. She has upended the subjectivity of punctum and turned it into a transmissible activist aesthetics of care, strategically accomplishing a feminist resistance in the form of activist art and giving FGM a powerful and essential visual presence, one that it has never had before. The notion of a completely appropriate visualization of this endlessly complex issue is futile. Considering *La Jeune Fille a La Fleur* demonstrates that an awareness of this futility should not hold artists back, for the alternative is to lose the representation, and reflexive critique of FGM entirely.

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Relational Dialectics, Interspecific Interactions, and Religious Animus in Jorge Amado's The War of the Saints – *A Postcolonial Critique*

Emmanuel Adeniyi

Introduction

The reciprocity of colonisation process and anti-colonial representations in Jorge Amado's *The War of the Saints* lends the text to postcolonial reading. The interplay recapitulates colonialist and anti-colonialist polemics on the discourse of imbalance and/or dominant influence

of colonial powers over their erstwhile colonies. The neo-colonial debate which narrates "all forms of control of the ex-colonies after political independence" (Ashcroft et al 2000, 146) by their erstwhile colonial masters is central to this discourse. Equally important is the understanding of nature of control, influence and power relations in post-independence African, Asian or South American nations. Considering the subtle or the most vicious form of political, cultural, religious and intellectual controls that ex-colonial powers wield over their former colonies, an insight can be said to have been gained into the on-going attempts by the West to (re)construct or perpetuate vestiges of colonialist ideologies and conditions in their ex-colonies. These conditions have also been met with stiff resistance from anti-colonialist elements in the concerned nations. To better appreciate the import of this dialectics, it is imperative to examine the moral foundation or justification often adduced by the colonial West to legitimise colonialism/imperialism vis-à-vis the ideological counterpoise of anti-colonialist forces. The anti-colonial elements contend that the rationalisation of colonialism/imperialism is a proof of the colonialists' imperviousness; hence the swingeing attacks against colonial hegemony by the anti-colonialists forces. Ashcroft has, for instance, identified the "smoke-screen of civilizing 'task', paternalistic 'development' and 'aid'" (2007, 54) as possible factors often put forward by the colonial West to rationalise colonialism/imperialism. However, anti-colonialist elements believe

these factors run contrary to reasoning in view of the epistemic violence and disruption that colonialism (has) unleashed on colonised spaces. Apart from its thingification garble (Cesaire 1955, 6), colonial structures were enthroned to depersonalise and zombify the subaltern.

The aim of this article is to contribute to the colonialist/anti-colonialist discourse by examining the representation of dialectical relations between the metropolitan powers and the subaltern population during and after colonial occupation of colonised spaces in the tri-continent of Africa, Asia, and South America. This examination is underpinned by the postcolonial self-delusional claim of metropolitan civilisation, technological sophistication, and "cultural ghettoization" (Alam and Purakayastha 2019, 16) of the subaltern. It specifically draws on colonial subjectivities and the weaponisation of colonialist ideological structures to *otherise* non-European population. This otherisation, as analysed in this article, takes the insidious covering of religion (Catholicism) (Tyson 2006, 419; Bulhan 2015, 241) to deepen the alterity of the subaltern. The article leverages on the Manichean imagination underscoring self-other tensions to indicate relational dialectics between colonialist and anti-colonialist elements in Brazil, as portrayed in Amado's *The War of the Saints*. The article is not an attempt to study Brazilian prose literature or any other national literature; it is rather a critical assessment offering a palimpsest of past and present in postcolonial literature.

Rather than doing a holistic study of current postcolonial literary themes, it uses a text produced in a postcolonial space to validate dominant rancorous practices and contradictions that define a conquered population by another. In this regard, Brazil's colonial experience serves as a correlate of Senegal's, just as India's colonial conditions parallel Cuba's, Myanmar's or Togo's conditions. Any literary text could as well be chosen from these conquered spaces to expound the prevailing dialectical relations between the conquerors and the conquered.

The choice of Amado's text for the article is manifold. First, it provides a succinct portrayal of human oppression in any postcolonial space. Second, the text reveals the relational dialectics between European Catholicism and Yorùbá (African) religions, as well as their faithful. Third, it helps to contextualise the current (re)positioning of Brazil by Jair Bolsonaro-led administration which has been accused variously of embarking on "minority witch-hunting" (Alam and Purakayastha 2019, 16) and introducing controversial policies targeted at the vulnerable, especially Blacks and indigenous Brazilians, in the South American most populous country (Lum 2019, par. 5). Consequently, Bolsonaro's Brazil is viewed as a correlate of Amado's Brazil. Though one is textual and the other real, the struggle for power relations between the colonisers and the colonised, white Brazilians and Afro-Brazilians or indigenous Brazilians has thrown the

country into a vortex of wars. The wars are an epic battle that similarly resonates in almost all the postcolonial nations of the world. While major-minor dichotomy prevails in India, especially among the Indian Hindu majority against Muslim minority, this tension also reverberates in Iraq, Syria, or Egypt where minority non-Moslems are persecuted and/or prevented from sharing their faith openly. The same is noticed in Africa and South America where religious, racial, ethnic, ideological cross-currents have escalated postcolonial wars. Amado's text then offers a symbolic signification for reading and interpreting avalanche of tensions or relational issues that predominate in nations that were once colonies of European superpowers. The rhetoric of transculturation in the text also makes it unique as it provides a literary platform for the mapping of continental triangulation in transatlantic slavery scholarship and the convergence of cultural interactions across three continents (Europe, Africa, and South America). The article, therefore, projects *The War of the Saints* as a simulacrum of Sartre's literature engagée to validate the recognition of Amado as a foremost Brazilian writer who believes that "the great social and political questions of our time should be the concern of every member of society" (Whiting 1948, 84). The text further proves his commitment towards discussing postcolonial tensions in Brazil's rainbow cultural space.

Preserving Colonialists' Vestiges in Brazil

Brazil, just like any other postcolonial countries in the Americas, was once under the colonial sway of Euro-

pean superpowers. Colonized by Portugal in the 15th century, Brazil – before eventually securing political independence – was, at one time or the other, invaded by Spain, the Netherlands, France and England (Meade 2010, 23-24). Each of these superpowers attempted to bring the country under their respective control. With the political independence of Brazil in 1822 from Portugal, the Portuguese preserved their colonial vestiges in the country and utilised the relics as a tool of influence over social, religious, political and economic decisions in the country. One of the institutions that serve as the vestige of the colonial West in Brazil is the Catholic Church (Schmidt 2016, 3). The Portuguese colonialists/imperialists employed the religious institution to control Brazilians prior to the political independence of the country. The Catholic Church has had a prolonged influence in Brazil. It started with the support and papal bulls issued to the Portuguese kings by successive Popes to propagate true faith, Christianise the whole world after the success of the Reconquista in the Iberian Peninsula (Adeniyi 2017, 55-83). Bruneau states that the "discovery and settlement of Brazil was a joint venture of the Portuguese state and the Catholic Church. With the sword went the cross, and in fact the colony was originally called the land of the true cross, Vera Cruz. Expansion in the colonial period by the Iberian powers was based on a combination of economic, political and religious motives" (1974, 12). Gilberto Freyre also reveals that "It is impossible to deny that the economic imperialism of Spain and Portugal was bound up in the most intimate fashion with the Church and the reli-

gious […] [because the] conquest of markets, lands, and slaves [equals] the conquest of souls" (Bruneau 1974, 249). It is also believed that Western powers still use the institution of the church as a tool of control in Brazil and the rest of Latin America, even though the rise of Evangélicos is dwindling the influence of Catholicism in the country (Schmidt 2016, 3). Though the tenor and character of the institution has undergone transformation considering the fusion of its practices with Yorùbá *òrìsà* worship, the colonial West is even confronted with a daunting task of pruning one of their important weapons of control on their erstwhile colony of its paganism and demonic influences. This appears to be the case with folk Catholicism which Bettina Schmidt notes is the predominant form of Christianity traditionally practised in which elements of African religions are syncretised with medieval Portuguese Christianity and indigenous beliefs (2016, 2).

The foregoing underlies the thematic concern of Jorge Amado's *The War of the Saints*. The text reveals the interest of the Vatican, represented by the levy of Catholic priests, to restore true Catholic faith in Bahia and strip it of heathenish practices. Amado's text enacts an outcome of virtue over vice, victory of the oppressed over their oppressors, and a comeuppance or just deserts for those who attempt to muffle the cultural expression of the oppressed (Afro-Brazilians). Set in Bahia, the novel narrates the deep involvement of the pantheon of

Yorùbá deities in the lives of Bahians as well as the syncretism of Yorùbá *òrìsà* worship with Catholic faith in the country. The narrative is woven around the power of Oya Yansan, the Yorùbá goddess of the sea and wife of Sàngó, to dispense justice and secure freedom for her devotees in Bahia. It also narrates the swift intervention of the goddess in thwarting the destruction of *òrìsà* worship as well as the relics of slavery by Catholic faithful. Oya Yansan, who has been syncretised with Saint Barbara of the Thunder in folk Catholicism, possesses the statue of her alter ego considered to be a priceless relic of Afro-Brazilians. Homed in the main church of Santo Amaro da Purificacao, it is released unwillingly by the hot-headed vicar of Santo Amaro, Father Teofilo Lopes de Santana. The statue is on its way to Bahia for a religious art exhibition in Bahia. Carried by *Sailor Without a Port*, the saint/statue disembarks on her own at the dock and disappears into the town visiting *iles or terreiro de Candomblé* (Houses of Candomblé). Her main intention for visiting Bahia is to secure the release of Manela interned at a convent by Adalgisa for participating in the Bomfim Thursday and planning to elope with her lover. The Bomfim Thursday is the most important festival in Bahia when Bahians wash the Cathedral with waters of Oxala. On the other hand, Adalgisa is a daughter of a Spaniard and a Black woman. Brought up by her godmother as a puritanical Catholic, she hates anti-Catholic practices. She sees Candomblé as a centre of perdition where the devil ensnares the souls of Christians. As an

abicun whose mother dies after a "swap of heads" sacrifice, Adalgisa refuses to embrace the religion of her forbears. Abicun is the Atlantic Yorùbá word for àbíkú – a child born several times but dies each time s/he is born. The "Swap of head" sacrifice implies that Dolores will die in place of her daughter, Adalgisa. Being an abicun, it is her fate to die and be born again. However, her death can be averted if anyone accepts to take her place. Having reached 21, Dolores decides to lay down her life for Adalgisa so that her first child can live. The child is, therefore, expected to be owned by Oya Yansan. She is also expected to serve the Yorùbá water goddess for the rest of her life.

Oya Yansan secures the release of Manela from the Lapa convent supernaturally. The goddess possesses Manela in front of the convent and eventually leads her to Candomblé do Gantois for initiation. In company of her confessor, Father Jose Antonio, Adalgisa secures another court order to arrest Manela and return her to the convent. Accompanied by two bailiffs and Father Antonio, Adalgisa is possessed on her way to Candomblé do Gantois by Oya Yansan chaperoned by other Yorùbá deities (Exu Male, Oxossi and Xango). Oxossi and Xango possess the bailiffs and they (bailiffs) begin to perform *saraband*, a dance indicating proper greetings to Exu, on the road. Father Antonio is humiliated by the gods. He is stripped naked, beaten, and later runs away. Adalgisa becomes unconscious and is carried by Exu Male on

his strange-looking donkey to the *caruru*, a feast in honour of Oya Yansan or any other Yorùbá gods in Bahia, of Jacira do Odo Oya where she is (re)presented as a daughter of Oya Yansan.

War between Catholicism and African Deities

Catholicism, in essence, serves as a representation of colonial influence in Brazil. It is a sad reminder of the Western misinterpretation of religion to justify the equation of Christianity with civilization, and equation of African religious practices with paganism or savagery (Césaire 1955). Catholicism, therefore, becomes one of the debating issues that pitch advocates or representatives of neo-colonial/imperial Brazil against those who stand against neo-colonialism/imperialism. This debate is even germane when contextualised within the oppressive military juntas and their anti-masses policies in most of the postcolonial nations around the globe. Other noticeable colonialist and anti-colonialist debates in Amado's *The War of the Saints* include cultural assimilation/acculturation issue, or the Europeanisation and Africanisation of Blacks and Whites respectively. Others include syncretism, hegemonic tendencies (the Aryan race theory, racism, separationism, race/culture stereotypes), and the Manichean categories of good/evil, black/white.

In the text, two opposing forces are at war with each other – the Catholic Church with its retinue of priests,

laymen or the feudal bourgeoisie/neo-colonialists and anti-syncretic individuals, on the one hand. On the other hand are the tribunes of the landless, defenders of plebeians, the advocates of Candomblé, or the defenders of the "Church of the Poor". The latter group also comprises pro-syncretic elements within Catholic faith who believe that the strength of Bahia (Brazil) lies in its miscegenation. While the Catholic Church is divided against itself, as some of its priests side with Candomblé and use their pastoral calling to denounce exploitation of the poor, arrogance of the feudalists, and military junta in Brazil; all Afro-Brazilians are united in their resolve to preserve their African identity. Besides, they join forces together to fight off attempts by the reactionary West to denounce and end tinctures of age-long transcultural elements which their enslaved ancestors carefully preserved in and through Catholic faith. However, few exceptions are noticed in the characterisation of Adalgisa, for instance. She deliberately distances herself from her mother's African side, downplays her African features and denies her identity as abicun. War is foregrounded in the text to indicate the resonance of disruption brought about by the oppositionality of two mutually exclusive faiths. While war manifests at interfaith level, its microcosmic intra-faith operation exhumes ingrained dissensions and schisms within Catholicism. In fact, the schism may be the fallout of affective polarisation and ideological distinctions that have shaped the institution of Catholicism in the last few years. These distinctions

may have also been premised on a number of factors, including the supportive or oppositional relationship of the church with the state, the failure of the Church to cater to the needs of the vulnerable, the manipulation of the Church by the elite bourgeois to defend their self-interests, and the opposition or support given to syncretic practices within Catholicism.

With regard to the text, the war within the Catholic Church begins with the open criticism of Candomblé and claim of bastardisation of Catholic principles by Catholic priests. This criticism to some of these priests and Afro-Brazilians, who are supportive of the marriage between Catholicism and Candomblé, is merely gratuitous. The primate of the archdiocese of Brazil, Dom Rudolph, accuses some clerics of endorsing evil worship among Catholic faithful, rather than condemning it. What Rudolph interprets as Catholic principles are those tendencies that perpetuate colonialist ideologies of subjugation, hegemony, arrogance and oppression. However, the parish priest of Piacava, Father Aberlado Galvao, believes otherwise. He holds the view that the essence of Christianity is to save the lost, help the needy, and not to abuse or denounce the poor and those who wish to syncretise their indigenous culture/religion with Catholic faith. Amado captures the war between the priests when Dom Rudolph summons father Aberlado Galvao to Bahia to explain his involvement in the attack of Santa Eliodora plantation owned by Colonel

Joaozinho Costa:

> Between the auxiliary bishop […] and the obscure parish priest from Piacava, the Army of Christ stood drawn up in battle formation […] Each was quite different from the other, the bishop's and the vicar's: on opposite sides, they were enemies. Dom Rudolph had no doubt whatever, and he would affirm it in an authoritative way: Christ's army had a centuries-old mission to uphold over five continents the property rights of the ruling classes. […] Father. Father Aberlado, on the contrary, considered that the Church required submission and blind obedience of its faithful, in the service of the rich and powerful – to the rich went the goods of this world, to the poor, the hope of the kingdom of heaven. (Amado 1993, 116-117)

The comment by Dom Rudolph that "Christ's army had a centuries-old mission to uphold over five continents the property rights of the ruling classes" is absolutist (Amado 1993, 116-117). The statement further ingeminates the Christianising mission of the Vatican as encapsulated in the papal bull of 1452 (Adeniyi 2018). The decree is an instance of anti-relativism which essentialises a given religion, but demonises the others. This sentiment clearly underlies colonialist discourse. The success of subjugating a given population by another is built on the otherisation of the epistemology and cultural practices of the conquered. Besides, the Marxist

tone underlying Father Galvao's belief, like some other anti-military, anti-colonialist clerics, accounts for his perception as a communist sponsored by Russiato destabilise Brazil. Father Galvao's perception is false; it is a web of lie spun by White supremacist priests to smear his good image which is in contrast to Dom Rudolph's. Dom Rudolph is noted for his hatred of syncretism, his belief in White supremacy and racial/Aryan purity disposition. He advocates stereotyping of Blacks and halfbreeds in Brazil, and openly canvasses for non-mixture of race. Dom Rudolph may be regarded as the textual representation of Jair Bolsonaro whose avowed "positions against affirmative action, against Black people, their alleged crimes and religions, and Black nations" (Alves and Vargas 2018, par. 10) fundamentally confirm anti-blackness spirit in Brazil. He hates cultural assimilation and denounces the postcolonial category which Ashcroft et al call "Going Native" – that is "the colonizers' fear of contamination by absorption into native life and customs" (2007, 106). In his theological opus, he advocates racial purity and condemns, "race-mixing and religious syncretism, defending the rigorous purity of the faith and the exactness of dogma" (Amado 1993, 66). As portrayed by Amado, Dom Rudolph believes that Bahia was:

> inhabited by idolatrous heathens and halfbreeds, the majority of them black, ignorant of the hegemonies of race and culture – that is, the Aryan race

> and Western culture – who broke the law, disobeyed the gospels, conjoined all the colors of the rainbow, and in illicit beds of love, mingled their blood and their gods […] it was most urgent […] to separate the wheat from the chaff, good from evil, and white from black, to impose limits, to draw boundaries. (Amado 1993, 67)

While Father Aberladois supported by the vicar of Santo Amaro (Dom Maximiliano von Gruden), the abbot of the Abbey of Saint Benedict (Father Teofilo Lopez de Santana), and Dom Timoteo Amoroso; the reactionary and conservative elements who crave the recreation of colonialist structures in post-independence Bahia (Brazil) include Dom Rudolph, also known as "auxiliary bishop". Other right-wingers include: Father Jose Antonio Hernandez, Adalgisa, the Chief Juvenile Judge for the District of Salvador (Dr Liberato Mendes Prado d'Avila), military apologists, and feudalists. The thread of Jorge Amado's narrative connects these two opposing forces and locks them up in an eternal feud. Branded as communists, the military and their Catholic conservatives – who similarly serve as swastikas in the text – use legal system, political power and deliberate stereotyping of their opponents to annihilate them. Ze do Liro, for instance, is hired to murder the supposed communists. Being a notorious hired assassin on the payroll of Colonel Joaozinho Costa, he believes that "If someone was willing to pay him to dispatch a living soul […] there had to be a good reason for it – nobody threw away money"

(Amado 1993, 271). As a proof of their brutality, Colonel Joaozinho Costa pays assassins to murder Father Aberlado Galvao, just as Father Henrique Pereira is killed in Pernambuco by constables of the military junta. Worse still, the spiritual forbear of Father Pereira, Frei Caneca, is also shot on the "Campo da Polvora, in the heart of the city of Bahia, to serve as an example" (Amado 1993, 265) to the dissenting voices. In an attempt to destroy legacies of slavery in Bahia, wipe out Candomblé from the city and its people, as well as realise the Vatican's mandate of ending the waning influence of Catholicism among heathens in the city and restoring true Catholicism in Brazil, Father Jose Antonio Hernandez builds a "New Church of Sant'Ana in Rio Vermelho" (Amado 1993, 175), which he calls"A splendid victory!" (Amado 1993, 175). According to the novel's omniscient narrator, the cleric:

> succeeded in building the large, imposing church dedicated to Mary's mother, whose worship had hitherto been reduced to a miserable chapel traditionally connected to street festivals and Candomblé ceremonies […] Even so, the victory wasn't complete, however, because father Jose Antonio had wanted to erect the new church on the ruins of a popular syncretic chapel located in the middle of Largo de Sant'Ana […] The majestic new Church of Sant'Ana […] had been built instead in between the Largo de Sant'Ana and Largo da Mariquita, right next to Colonia de Pescadores, the fishermen's colony. This site was also ap-

> propriate, for as tall and broad as the church was, it would smother – that was how the priest had imagined it – the Peji de Yemanja, the queen of the sea. (Amado 1993, 175-176)

Father Antonio is also involved in the plan to extinguish the "Engenho Velho Candomblé, the Ile Iya Nasso, the most ancient and venerable fetishist temple in Bahia" (Amado 1993, 176) which dates back to 1830. He goes about this whipping up sentiment of Catholic faithful, feudalists and business owners in Bahia against Candomblé. For instance, he "Appealed to the interests and greed of the property owners and real estate magnates" (Amado 1993, 177), and draws their attention to the White House on the top of a hill. The house is a Candomblé temple, and places of worship for other African-based religions in Bahia. The Black people of Bahia who are advocates of syncretism and culture preservation, however, react against Father Antonio's moves. They mobilise one another to counter his plan to obliterate their cultural patrimony. To spite the Catholic Church and neo-colonial apologists in Bahia, Jorge Amado writes that "the common people, the black masses, led by Flaviano, the president of the Colonia de Pescadores" (Amado 1993, 176) "had assembled to the sound of drums and Yoruba songs to dedicate a statue of Yemanja erected between the church and the Casa do Peso, the work of Manual do Bomfim, a sculptor in the area" (Amado 1993, 176). On learning about the effron-

tery of Candomblé people in Bahia, Father Jose Antonio "burning with anger, inveighed against sacrilege and barbarism" (Amado 1993, 176) in his homily, and denounces their action, which he describes as "unheard-of, a bit of insolence, frightful!" (Amado 1993, 176).

The preternatural involvement of Oya Yansan in the intractable feud saves Father Aberlado Galvao from being shot by Ze do Lirio. Patricia da Silva Vaalserberg has offered a sacrifice of blood to Oya at Axe of Alaketu on behalf of Father Galvao, because she is deeply in love with him and does not want anything untoward to happen to him. Oya preternaturally prevents Father Galvao's arrest by the combination of federal and state police at the heat of the disappearance of the statue of Saint Barbara the Thunder. Exu Mae, who is summoned by Oya to help in the fight against anti-òrìsà forces in Bahia, appears as "a fellow Pernambucan, a halfbreed" (Amado 1993, 298) on a donkey. He prevents the murder of Father Galvao during an improvised Candomblé carnival organised for Antenne Deux, a film production for the French audience in Paris. Ze do Lirio, who never misses his target, is confronted with an unimaginable situation as all his efforts to have his bullets hit his target fail:

> Father Aberlado had come down from the music truck holding a tambourine and Patricia put her arm around his waist. Ze do Lirio came forward, aimed

> his revolver at the back of the doomed man's neck from a yard away, and pulled the trigger. But someone bumped his arm – it leaped like a broken spring – and the bullet sped off toward the horizon. Ze do Lirio turned around, ready to liquidate the brazen person who had dared to push his elbow. But he saw no one except the dozing man and the donkey, who was busy chewing the printed paper, tasty and nutritious as it was. The couple was still dancing a Carnival step, and Ze do Lirio had no time to figure out what had happened. He forced his way through the crowds and took aim at the head of the lewd priest […] but once more his arm shook, and the bullet disappeared into the thin air. The same thing happened on his third, fourth, and fifth tries, until there was only one bullet left in the revolver. Ze do Lirio was going slightly crazy. (Amado 1993, 299)

Apart from Catholicism, the Convent of Immaculate Conception is another Portuguese colonial vestige in Bahia. As a synecdochic reference to the anachronism pervading Catholic faith in Brazil, the convent is also indicative of brutality of colonialism and its enduring structures that confine, intern and restrict in order to correct errors, teach morality and possibly ensure spiritual wholeness of inmates. On hearing that Manela has been interned at the convent, the swift dispatch with which Bahians attempt to ventilate their angst against the convent and its workforce speaks volumes about their hatred of the colonial/Catholic vestige. Even the Moth-

er Leonor de Lima, the head of the convent, expresses surprise on learning that a young girl is to be kept in the custody of the convent: "The mother superior was startled by the request. It's been years since we took in the last one – a girl from the Baixo Sao Francisco […] Her father brought a letter of recommendation from the bishop of Barra. She died here, poor thing, from tuberculosis. Or from melancholy – only God knows" (Amado 1993, 236). Father Jose Antonio's response to the superior mother is revealing. It indicates the uncanny disposition of an average colonialist or colonial apologist whom Césaire believes has a Hitler inside him (1955, 3). He seeks to apply colonialist procedures to the abjected Afro-Brazilians, and refuses to be moved by their plight, their chequered history or their fate as colonial or postcolonial subjects. Their liminality, in-between essor the state of confusion and demoralisation that confronts them (the colonised) is of no concern to the colonialists/imperialists. The same mind-set drove slave merchants and their African compradors who ignored the unimaginable suffering and plight of their victims while transatlantic slave trade lasted (Adeniyi 2017). Father Antonio has simply replied to superior mother's comment, saying, "This house of God was founded by those who came before us to protect virtue and punish sin – don't forget that, Mother. You should celebrate the chance, Mother, to fulfil the order of the Lord when the occasion arises" (Amado 1993, 237).

The internment of Manela in Lapa convent parodies the pathetic story of Saint Barbara who lived in the Syrian city of Heliopolis in the 3rd century. Upon losing his wife, Dioscorus – Saint Barbara's pagan father and a wealthy nobleman – was said to have devoted himself to his daughter and built a tower to protect and prevent her from becoming a Christian. In this context, one should refer to Michael Jordan's article, "Saint Barbara the Martyr". The only difference between the two narratives is that Barbara died in defence of her faith; Manela, however, lives and gets initiated into Candomblé. In the light of the foregoing, The War of the Saints can be read as the war of ideological distinctions and the vaunted ego that fuelled slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and racism. The ego is reinforced by superior-inferior category in the collective unconscious of the colonialists/imperialists. Just as Frantz Fanon puts it, "Inferiorization is the native correlative to the European's feeling of superiority" (1952, 73); besides, "it is the racist who creates the inferiorized" (1952, 73), and determines the superior person using his own measurements.

Towards Dismantling Colonialist Structures

In Jorge Amado's *The War of the Saints*, Oya clearly performs her new role as a dispenser of justice and a goddess who seeks the freedom of her children from oppressive tendencies that subjugate them in post-slavery Brazil. Among the continental (African) Yorùbá, Oya

(Yansan) is the favourite wife of Sàngó – a primordial African god associated with thunder and lightning (Pessoa de Barros, 2008). Apart from serving as the tribune of the poor and defender of the rights of her own people, the goddess also exercises her powers to dismantle vestiges of Portuguese/Spanish imperialism. She achieves this by preventing imperialists and their representatives from erasing relics of slavery in Bahia. Upon her disappearance as the statue of Saint Barbara of the Thunder, the goddess mingles with Bahians and gathers up along her way to the barracao, a large room or hall where Candomblé ceremonies take place, "injustices and evil deeds, carrying them in a bundle under her left arm, while in her right hand were thunder and lightning" (Amado 1993, 16). Even at the barracao, she lies at the feet of "[a]n *iyalorixa, a mae de santo*, a priestess, […] large enough to gather in her lap of hills and valleys all the complaints, torments, and entreaties of her sons and daughters, the people of Bahia" (Amado 1993, 17). To foreground her justice-seeking mission and her quest to redress injustice, the first act she performs in Bahia is to throw an impostor out of the house and bring about restoration:

> Why did Oba Are sit on the edge of an ordinary bench set out for visitors and not in one of the wicker chairs reserved for guests of honor? Wherever he sat, that was where the throne was, the ogan-da-sala said, trying to explain. Oya agreed with that no-

> tion, but she didn't accept it as an excuse for such inexcusable presumption. Sketching a gesture in the air, she dumped the insolent pretender out of the chair he'd dared to occupy. The Africanologist found himself violently shaken by Oya, with a gale force that uproots trees and flings them far away. Lifted up and thrown onto the ground, he felt a punch in the chest and another in the pit of his stomach, along with a couple of slaps on his face. He got up, groggy, gasping for breath, and rounded up his troop of nitwits – he was a tour guide – and beat a hasty retreat. (Amado 1993, 17-18)

Her main assignment, which set her and other Yorùbá gods against Catholic/European reactionary forces, is to "free a young woman named Manela from captivity and to teach her aunt Adalgisa what it means to have to wear a packsaddle […] to teach her tolerance and joy and the goodness of life" (Amado 1993, 19). Manela is a symbol of the oppressed in the narrative. She represents the voiceless, the downtrodden, the subaltern. Her predicament at the hands of her aunt, Adalgisa, is reminiscent of trans-Atlantic slavery that uprooted millions of Africans from their homeland and sent them into forced labour in the New World. In the novel, there are two opposing forces and two contending faiths. Similarly, there are binary oppositions of African/European cultural dichotomy, Catholicism/Candomblé rift, and old/new orders. While one (European/Catholic order) subjugates the other; the victims/the subjugated seek freedom from

their captivity which they are incapable of securing by themselves, hence the involvement of the gods to deliver the abjected Afro-Brazilians from oppressive, restrictive tendencies that stymie their aspirations and cultural expressions. The major leitmotif in *The War of the Saints* is how to secure liberty for the voiceless. This motif is central to the anti-colonialist campaign mounted against European superpowers in many English, French, Portuguese, Spanish and Dutch colonies. The gods secure freedom for the oppressed from their oppressors: the Catholic Church (the Vatican), Adalgisa, Europeans, and equally other forces that attempt to abrogate *òrìsà* worship in Bahia, Brazil. The pursuit of freedom and justice in the text can also be bifurcated into Oya Yansan's quest for emancipation of her people, especially Manela and Adalgisa, and the quest by the anti-military Catholic priests and faithful for a responsive and non-conservative,non-restrictive Catholic faith in Bahia.

While the contending issue between the two Catholic opposing forces borders on the sacred status of the Catholic Church in Brazil, Bahians – most of whom are products of miscegenation – oppose the claim. To some priests and laymen, the Catholic Church has been greatly polluted owing to its fusion with Yorùbá *òrìsà* worship. To Bahians, the glory of Bahia lies in its mixed blood status, and Candomblé helps to protect the African heritage in Brazil. Manela is a victim of puritanical Catholic orthodoxy. She needs the intervention of a Yorùbá god-

dess to secure her freedom from internment and inhibiting forces that frustrate the expression of her cultural heritage as well as her aspiration to toe the path of her mother who dies a Candomblé devotee. Manela's African side prevails over her European features. Adalgisa, an abicun, needs the healing of *òrìsà* for her to be cured of her migraine, rotten moods, and hatred for sexual intimacy with her husband, Danilo. She distances herself from her African side and remains "loyal to the Catholicism of [her] father, Don Francisco Romero Perez y Perez […] [and] followed the path of the Spanish colony and Holy Mother Church with no deviation" (Amado 1993, 46).

The anti-military priests advocate a Catholic faith or "Church of the Poor" that will cater for the needy, allocate land to the landless, and limit the powers of feudalists and supporters of oppressive military junta in Brazil. They see nothing wrong in having *òrìsà* worship in the church. The priests, therefore, need preternatural powers that will protect them from hired assassins who have sent many of their colleagues to their early graves. The coming of Oya Yansan to Bahia is then timely, considering her assignment to free her children and redress injustice which the church and the representatives of the Vatican have been unable to fix. Oya Yansan, for instance, indicates her interest to set free. Manela's possession by Oya in front of the convent – a symbol of Catholic faith and vestige of European imperialism – and the dances

performed by Manela in front of the convent also portray the victory of justice over injustice:

> [S]he came out dancing along the sidewalk by the convent, went down to the square – Master Pastinha couldn't see, but he could guess what was happening. He raised his hands and lowered his head as is obligatory and greeted the *orixa*: "Eparrei, Oya!" The people repeated as a chorus, the palms of their hands at face level turned toward the enchanted one: "*Eparrei*, Yansan, mother of thunder! *Eparrei*, Oya!" Manela's face glowed, her body loose in the novice's habit, in the swirl of the dance, more beautiful than Miro had ever seen her. (Amado 1993, 245-246)

The encounter between the two contending forces on Avenida Cardeal da Silva – the way that leads to Candomblé do Gantois, where Manela is to be initiated into the religion of her mother – perhaps accounts for the origin of the novel's title. The encounter creates a public scenario where the Yorùbá gods and their reactionary Catholic opponents test their might. Father Jose Antonio who represents the West (the swastika), Adalgisa, and two bailiffs are on their way to forcefully arrest Manela and return her to the Lapa convent, only to be confronted by Exu Male, Xango and Oxossi at the behest of Oya Yansan. The outcome of the encounter sees the gods having an upper hand over the Catholic faith, and the victory of justice over injustice:

> Fighting on the side of obscurantism was Father Jose Antonio Hernandez, the Falangist, the swastika guts, the anathema mouth, the atomic balls. Fighting on the side of humanism were the three orixas from Africa, Oxossi, Xango, and Esu Male […]Adalgisa fell to her knees, her hands outstretched, her arms lifted up to heaven. Above all, she didn't want to cease being a lady. Gripping the vermeil Christ, Father Jose Antonio hastened to exorcise her: "Get thee behind me, Satan!" Satan didn't get behind him – on the contrary – he didn't obey the command at all. Seven leaps, the migrant man, swiftly fell onto the exorcist, accompanied by his donkey. The stocky man brandished the leather strap that he'd taken off the harness, as the jackass danced to the rhythm of a pasodoble, farting, [shitting], and kicking. In his attempt to escape the whip, Father Jose Antonio received a poorly shod hoof on his rear end […] the priest was stretched out in the shrubbery on the avenue's divider. Up ahead, Adalgisa lay prostrate, her exhausted body stretched out, her head bursting with the headache that was about to leave her forever […] Father Jose Antonio […] raised his arms in surrender at the approach of the three demons, who no doubt were to put an end to him. (Amado 1993, 307)

From the encounter, the Catholic priest surrenders to the overwhelming powers of Yorùbá gods who are hell bent to deal with Western colonial forces that seek to wipe out the legacies of relentless battles fought against slavery by Africans in Bahia. Oya Yansan's appearance in Bahia and the ambush laid by the African gods for swas-

tikas who, out of wounded pride, want to reverse the irreversible, is probably an age-long vengeance that the gods have probably been seeking against the imperialists and their descendants. The involvement of the goddess and other Yorùbá gods is premised on their constant worship. Rather than seeing Catholicism as a religion with eclectic doctrines, the Vatican prefers to prune the faith of its pagan practices and restore its puritanical rigidity. However, Bahians enjoy the omnibus status of the religion and want no religious faith that denies the expression of their selfhood and preservation of their indigenous African culture.

Conclusion

Amado's text presents the relational dialectics that characterises the interspecific interactions between the colonialists and the colonised. The relationship is predatory and fraught with power struggle, racial and religion animus, and stereotyping. The novel narrates the contentions between swastikas (the Western powers) who through their religious logic want a perpetuation of colonialist structures and Afro-Brazilians (Bahians) who put up a stiff resistance against structures of oppression and exploitation. Amado's subtle message is that, if united, the oppressed always carry the day in any confrontation with their oppressors. This concern is chimerical and quixotic, since happenings in many postcolonial nations in Africa, Asia, and South America prove otherwise.

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Identity and Representational Dilemmas: Attempts to De-Orientalize the Arab

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Since its release in 1978, Edward Said's *Orientalism* has been a foundational text in postcolonial studies and many other fields. Much of the text elaborately traces the beginning of the Western stereotyping of the East and how the negative images of Arabs in particular have been sustained through literature, films, and media. Before any discussion of the post-9/11 stereotyping of Arabs, it is important to note that the American tradition of Orientalism, as explained by Said, is different to that of the British and the French. The American experience

in Eastern countries has been described as much less direct and thus based on abstractions. On the other hand, the British and the French enjoyed long cultural encounters with many countries in the East during the colonial period. Douglas Little demonstrates that "in 1776 what the average American knew about the Middle East and its peoples likely came from two sources: the King James Bible and Scheherazade's *Thousand and One Arabian Nights*" (2008, 11). American Orientalism is also often politicized due to the presence of Israel in the Middle East and Americans associate Orientalism with the imported images from the long-standing conflict between Arabs and Israel. In the last few decades, the American version of Orientalism has been emphasized and disseminated through Hollywood films such as *Jewel of the Nile* (1985), *Three Kings*(1993), *Fahrenheit 9/11*(2004), *Sleeper Cell*(2005). The war on Afghanistan, the invasion of Iraq, and the rise of ISIS also produced new images that disrupted the old archive.

In the pre-9/11 era, Arab Americans were almost invisible in American culture and media. Due to their wide diversity, they resisted fitting well with a particular categorization that can define their racial/ethnic identity. Nadine Naber argues that "the US's racializing system, which is reinforced by the US media, has racialized Arab Americans according to a unique and contradictory process, resulting in their white but not quite racial/ethnic status" (2000, 56). Additionally, Naber contends

that before 9/11 Arab Americans were not racially victimized to the same degree as other communities that had a history of racial oppression within the United States by the United States government. Nonetheless, what Naber addresses in her article is the situation of Arab Americans in 2000 and before. The 9/11 attacks brought Arab Americans to a position that they could not have imagined. It marked the beginning of a new era that brought about unbearable changes and resulted in some Arab Americans becoming the victims of a popular backlash. As Steven Salaita observes, following the attacks "Arabs and Muslims became major targets of racial profiling, ethnic discrimination, and human rights violations" (2005, 152). The events of 9/11 put so-called multiculturalism and the celebrated melting pot of America to a real test. They also created a dichotomy between the 'good' Arab and the 'bad' Arab in popular culture. In an attempt to conform to the idea of a good Arab, some Arab Americans even changed their names and tried to show greater degrees of cultural assimilation, a process of moral racialization explored by Georgiana Banita as "the articulation of a racially suspicious enemy figure propagated through the visual media and intended to absorb and redirect as much public resentment as possible" (2012, 171). In the same vein, Carol Fadda-Conrey posits that the "Orientalist discourse has taken on an additional policing role after 9/11, portraying Arabs and Muslims as perpetual aliens, volatile extremists, and potential or actual terrorists (in the case of

men) or oppressed, silenced, and disenfranchised subjects (in the case of women)"(2014, 2). In the same vein, Sally Howell and Andrew Shryock also point out that "non-Arabs began to use terms like "you people" when talking to Arab neighbors, relatives, and friends" (2003, 444). Using this phrase 'you people' suggests an attempt to protect from what Howell and Shryock term "collective guilt" (2003, 444).

Silke Schmidt contends that "9/11 revealed a general lack of knowledge about Muslims, Arabs, and Arab Americans and many unanswered questions which had existed long before the attacks" (2014, 14). Anglophone Arab literary responses to 9/11 attempt to address this context and respond to the level of the events. Nadine Naber believes that "one of the most effective ways to dismantle the virulent generalizations of Arab Americans is to humanize the people that are subject to them" (2000, 1). In this case, offering lesser heard narratives and carving a space in the literary arena contributed to the humanization of Arab Americans and made an attempt to break down common stereotyping of Arab Americans. Following the events of 2001, there emerged many novelistic voices articulating the tribulations of the voiceless, and also attempting to humanize Arabs and Muslims. Nouri Gana reflects that the "Anglophone Arab novels that appeared before or after September 11 have in many ways sought to educate Euro-Americans about Arabs and Muslims by dramatizing the yawning

gap between, on the one hand, the quotidian experiences of everyday Arabs and Muslims and, one the other hand, the free-floating and intransigent mainstream discourses of Arabness and Islam" (2015, 19). Also, in response to the tragedy of 9/11, there surfaced a sprouting scholarship on Arab Americans and their literature. Thus, post-9/11 Anglophone Arab fiction, as Gana noted, aims to challenge imperial hegemonies and systematic racism and to affirm cultural conviviality (2015, 22). She explains that "Arabs are saturated in the American imaginary with the Orientalist images, and most American students come to class not as a blank slate but rather with their imagination already informed or misinformed with those very Orientalist images" (2015, 30). Post-9/11 Anglophone Arab fiction offers contemporary readers new representations of Arabs and Arab Americans as well as conscious critical interventions in a contentious social and political context.

Some critics consider 9/11 as an opening to introduce the Arab in a new literary manner. Zuzana Tabačková argues that "9/11 prompted the representatives of Anglophone Arab literature to express their stance towards the attacks, and it also marked the birth of the reader of Anglophone Arab literature" (2015, 109). Al Maleh also explains that "the irony of Anglophone Arab literature is that it did not gain attention or attain recognition until the world woke up one day to the horror of the infamous 9/11 and asked itself who those 'Arabs'

really were" (2009, 1). Consequently, post-9/11 writing remains educative and concerned mainly with racism, discrimination, and the burgeoning of Orientalist stereotypes. In their book *Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and Representation after 9/11*, Morey and Yaqin argue that "the time has come to examine closely the process of stereotyping; how certain images are deployed and circulated and how they anticipate an answer from the group being stereotyped" (2011, 22). Morey and Yaqin call for the exploration of the stereotyping mechanism as a whole which would eventually lead to the formulation of a de-orientalizing theory. Exposing the 'othering' of Arabs can also enhance certain anti-essentialist strategies to allow such ethnicity to speak and exert influence on mainstream discourse. Instead of fictionalizing 9/11, Arab American writers in their autobiographical narratives attempt to respond to 9/11 and reframe their image in a society inundated with anti-Arab sentiment.

De-Orientalizing the Arab

To de-orientalize the Arab in contemporary fiction is to initially employ and adopt certain discursive strategies, most notably the counter-narrative and deconstruction. The three Arab American novelists discussed in this article are among the first to employ these strategies, exposing hierarchy, power relationships, hegemony, and profiling in relation to the post-9/11 context. Laila Halaby is an Arab American novelist whose debut novel, *West of*

the Jordan (2003) won the prestigious PEN Beyond Margins Award. Her second novel *Once in A Promised Land* (2007) narrates the story of an Arab American couple in the wake of 9/11 attacks. The novel represents trauma and injustice and attempts to unravel much of the stereotyping that emerged as a response to the attacks. Halaby begins her novel by employing metafiction as a technique and asking the readers to deactivate their negative stereotypes of Arabs. She asks that the readers to examine their awareness of Arab Americans and stop creating Orientalist images offered by competing and fake representations. Her opening asks:

> Before I tell you this story, I ask that you open the box and place in it any notions and preconceptions, any stereotypes with regard to Arabs and Muslims that you can find in your shirtsleeves and pockets, tucked in your briefcase, forgotten in your cosmetic bag, tidied away behind your ears, rolled up in your underwear, saved on your computer's hard drive (viii).

By employing this opening, Halaby invites into the novel a new readership; one that is open to understanding alternative perspectives on Arab Americans. She requests the reader to put aside the derogative and dehumanizing stereotypes: "There's room for all of your billionaires, bombers, and belly-dancers" (viii). She presents terrorists as external to the Islamic faith and not representatives of the Arab nation. Moreover, Halaby actually refuses to commence the telling of her narrative until the

reader consciously sets aside these established images. She demands:

> No turbans, burqas, or violent culture[...]And for good measure, why don't you throw in those hateful names as well, ones you might never even utter: Sand Nigger, Rag Head, and Camel Jockey. You don't need them for this story [...] And finally, throw in those thoughts about submissive women [...] and hands cut off [...] and multiple wives [...] and militant bearded men (viii).

Halaby opens up alternative discursive spaces that encourage the inclusion and consideration of the Arab American voice. Debra Merskin states that "once an individual is defined as a social outsider on the basis of meeting a set of stereotypes, he finds himself in 'symbolic exile', often even denied the most fundamental trait of 'having humanity'" (2004, 161). Halaby is well aware of the degradation of the Arab ethnicity, and the novel opens by explicitly addressing this issue. From the beginning of the novel, we find Halaby's characters struck with bewilderment regarding their representation in contemporary society. Jassim, while swimming in a pool, finds it hard to comprehend what has happened on 9/11 and his mind is fraught with doubt and confusion:

> What entered into someone's mind to make him (them!) want to do such a thing? It was incompre-

> hensible. And unnatural—human beings fought to survive, not to die. And had they, those many people who seemed to join together in crazy suicide, had any idea that they would cause such devastation? That both buildings would collapse? (20).

Though the main characters in the novel, Salwa and Jassim, are professional in their careers and dedicated to their work, holding American citizenships, and leading a secular life, they cannot escape a backlash following the attacks. As the narrative develops, Jassim and Salwa become aware of their real predicament as they are exposed to a number of demoralizing and humiliating experiences including surveillance, discrimination, prejudice and hostility. Jassim came to the United States as a simple, focused man whose main goal was to expand his knowledge so that he could improve his life and the lives of others. It is only after 9/11 he realizes that the world had split into two halves. His knowledge and skills become valueless when he is recognized in the American world as an Arab. His protest that "It's crazy they're not looking at who you are as a person, at all the great work you've done [...] they're looking at the fact that you're an Arab" (301) suggests his reduction to the 'social hazard' of Georgiana Banita's words. Reducing him into such a state means that he is socially alienated which later results in identity crisis.

Rabih Alameddine approaches the post-9/11 context in a slightly different manner, weaving his novel *The*

Hakawati (2008) around the diverse past of Arabs in the Middle East. Encouraging readers to "listen" and put themselves "beyond imagining" in the first sentences of the novel, he reminds us that there can be no final answers or conclusions to these new contexts. Rabih Alameddine begins his novel by employing metafictional device borrowed from the Arabic tradition of storytelling: "Listen…Listen. Allow me to be your god. Let me take you on a journey beyond imaging. Let me tell you a story" (5). The purpose, as it is set in the first few words of the novel, is primarily to take the reader on a fascinating journey that is definitely beyond abstractions and mythical stereotypes. It is a deconstructive strategy to demonstrate to the reader the commonalities that exist between cultures. With stories full of imps, jinis, adventurous poets, historical heroes, both Middle Eastern and Western fables, the reader is exposed to a world that is medieval, yet modern and sometimes postmodern.

Alameddine delves deep into the ancient, medieval, and modern history of the Middle East. He delineates a history in an elegant manner, inviting the reader not to misunderstand but to explore. There is a long tradition of 'hakawati'[1] in Arabic culture. The word 'hekayah' in Arabic means a story, fable, news; hakawati is derived from the Arabic word 'haki'. Hakawatis are people who gain money from telling stories with an aim to beguile the listeners. From its title, Alameddine's novel announces its aim to tell stories. However, this novel is not simply about stories but rather a project to cast the past afresh

in front of the reader. The novel attempts to offer a narrative matrix to readers, it contains many stories with mixed storylines from different resources and cultures, we find mythical stories, fables, stories from Islamic cultures, stories from Christianity and Quran, and also stories of the main character, Osama. By forging these tales altogether, Alameddine suggests that we are all made up of stories that converge and diverge across cultures and periods. In the novel, we find Jews, Arabs, Muslims, Christians, Druze, Lebanese, Egyptians, Armenians, Persians, Saudis, and Kurds, and all have different roles to play in constructing a single narrative structure. What is eloquently stressed in these astonishing stories is the fact that people; despite the disparity of their beliefs or political views, need to listen to each other and to respect each other's perspectives whatever the differences might be.

The Orientalist representation of Arabs did not depict them with any accuracy or respect, and the lack of exploration of this ethnicity prompted Alameddine to reject the one-dimensional caricature. His attempt is to deconstruct the Orientalist legacy and offer an amalgamation of Arabs and their cultural history. His reductive view is directed at the persistence of the Orientalist myths which form a frame of reference to the stereotypes of Arabs and Arab Americans. Borrowing different narrative frames, Alameddine's novel is built upon the notion of hybridity. It undermines the textual au-

thority that underlies the one coherent narrative voice. It is a response to what Morey and Yaqin identify as "the other half of a distorted dialogue" (2011, 5). A story never exists on its own, it is always created from the stories that the 'hakawati' has heard or invented before (Tabačková 2015, 221). In this case, Alameddine's understanding of storytelling is similar to Roland Barthes's notion of the author. The authoritative voice is eclipsed and borderlines between tales and genres are blurred. For him what matters is the finished product, regardless of authorial presence or intensions. In the Notes and Acknowledgment page of the novel, Alameddine states that "a storyteller is plagiarist" (2008, 515) and he enlists a number of sources included in his novel. He invokes Barthes conception of a text as "a tissue of citations, resulting from the thousand sources of culture" (1967, 7). Based on these conceptions, the novel presents an interesting model that accommodates multiple co-existing identities, multiple versions of truth, and numerous layers of competing realities.

Alameddine's novel offers a non-official narrative of the Middle East. It incorporates religious tales of Abraham, Hagar, Noah, and other prophets, and also fictionalizes the 'sirah' books which are valorized in Islam. Threads of intertexuality feature the works and stories of classical Arab poets such as al-Mutanabbi, Abu Nawas, Antar and Abla, Layala and Majnoun, which all remain central to Arabic literary and cultural history. In one sense, Al-

ameddine seems obsessed with reminding Arab Americans with their cultural roots. In another sense, by injecting his novel with great Arab figures, he functions as a cultural informant with an educative aim. Nonetheless, intertexuality develops the narrative and gives credibility to the depiction in the novel.

In *The Hakawati*, Osama's storyline forms the centre of the novel. Osama is an Arab American who returns back to Lebanon to see his dying father. It is there in Lebanon that we know something about the history of the al-Kharat family and how they were the best storytellers in the whole region. One thing that the novel emphasizes is that 'Kharats' (liars in English) consider storytelling a profession. As professional storytellers, Kharats fabricate stories out of their imagination just to amuse the listeners and gain some money for the entertainment. What Alameddine tries to point out is that stories in the medieval Arabic literature, and even *The Arabian Nights*, were created for fun merely to amuse the princes and kings of that time. Just like poets of the princely court and corridors whose main concern was to praise and extol, Kharats are also similar in their attitudes. Alameddine, in this sense, employs irony. There is an attempt to deconstruct *The Arabian Nights* which is sometimes seen in the United States and Europe as the ethnographic source of information about Arabs, reducing it into its authentic form as a fictional tale.

The name "Osama" is also interesting particularly in 9/11 context. Uttering or hearing the name "Osama" has become fearful for almost all Americans, as it reminds them of Osama bin Laden. After 9/11 Osama bin Laden came into prominence, as it was claimed that it was he who planned and funded those terrorists who blew up the World Trade Center. Interestingly, Alameddine's novel is narrated by a nice man called Osama. By doing this, Alameddine creates a new Osama whose goal is to entertain, not to terrorize. Alameddine's Osama is half American and half Arab. Though he returns to his home which is Arab, he finds himself as a stranger. He has a universal perspective, and he is not fanatic at all. He tells us stories of European, Arabian, and Persian origins and by featuring Osama Al-Kharat in this manner, Alameddine intends to smash the American notion that all Arabs are like Osama bin Laden.

Alia Yunis' *The Night Counter* is another novel which defiantly attempts to cast some light on the sources that even today perpetuate and enhance the cycle of stereotyping of Arabs. For this purpose, Yunis revives Scheherazade[2] and brings her to the twenty-first century United States. Yet, Scheherazade is no longer a narrator; she has been reversed from a teller to a listener. It is Fatima Abdullah, a Lebanese woman migrated to the United States, who narrates the stories. Fatima narrates her stories to Scheherazade, stories about her family, about the Middle East and also about life in the United States. Her stories re-

configure the Arab American heritage as well as culture. What is striking is Yunis' revival of Scheherazade in the American context. If we consider Edward Said's definition of Orientalism as "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (1987, 3), we may be able to consider why Alia Yunis casts Scheherazade in a new American mold. By revisiting Scheherazade, Alia Yunis attempts to gain access to American popular culture, and also aligns herself with her Arab past and heritage. Another important reason is that Scheherazade as the most prominent figure in The Arabian Nights is misrepresented in the United States, and Yunis, as noted by Vinson, "takes symbolic material from the *The Arabian Nights* and links it to other material within American frameworks" (2014, 57). She attempts to reshape and reframe the degenerative Orientalist images of Arabs from within the American society itself. *The Night Counter* not only recounts the history of Fatima Abdulla's family, but it rather investigates the various alterations of Scheherazade's image that continually reappear in the United States.

The Night Counter stresses reclaiming the Arab heritage through renewed and rehabilitating strategies of counter-narrative. Storytelling is essential in defining the self and creating modes of belonging. However, the oriental material culture is frequently appropriated and reproduced to confirm to the stereotypical images in American popular culture. Naomi Rosenblatt in this regard contends that "American vendors and business take

advantage of the aesthetics of Orientalism in order to encourage consumer spending and indulgence" (2009, 51). The novel also highlights the ways through which Arab Americans themselves contribute to the dissemination and circulation of the distorted images of Scheherazade. In the novel, the distorted images of Scheherazade have been manipulated by Fatima's children and grandchildren as marketing strategies. For instance, Zade, Fatima's grandson opens a hookah bar, naming it "Scheherazade's Diwan Café" and lavishly decorating it with beautiful calligraphy and a drawing of a half-naked belly dancer, probably portraying Scheherazade. On the entrance to Zade's café, Scheherazade is represented in attire that immediately recalls the images that have been entrenched by Orientalists. This affirms the extent to which the aesthetics of the Orient have been appropriated and become part of contemporary American culture. When she sees the distorted images, Yunis's Scheherazade reluctantly refuses to recognize herself in a sexualized, commercialized manner. Another example that *The Night Counter* gives is Soraya, Fatima's daughter, who take on the name "Scheherazade the Magnificent" (2009, 132) just to gain money by doing an odd job. Dismayed by seeing how her distorted images have been easily made for the service of Orientalist, Scheherazade in a frenzied state rattles:

> She—Scheherazade, daughter of the Great Wazir and wife of King Shahrayar, reciter of love stories, religious legends, and the poetry of the magnificent

> Abu Nawas—was not a charlatan playing out people's fates with devil's cards and fiberglass balls (137).

Alia Yunis addresses the assimilationist attitudes embraced by some Arab Americans. In her novel, Randa and her husband, Bashar, show no interest in looking back at their Arab heritage. They desperately attempt to assimilate into the American culture so that they acquire 'whiteness status'. Randa dyes her hair blonde, changes her name to Randy, and gives her husband, Bashar, the name 'Bud'. Through these characters, the novel demonstrates the absurdity and contradictions that result from denouncing one's identity.

Post-9/11 New Vistas

In his article "Embargoed Literature", Edward Said labeled Arabic literature as an "embargoed literature"[3] and, until the events of 9/11 it could be argued that the Arab world failed to represent itself and overcome an orientalizing legacy in literature. Today, many scholars, writers, and critics look upon 9/11 as turning point through which Arab American writers, activists, and scholars would gain agency and better represent themselves.

Edward Said makes it clear that "the relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of

domination, of varying degrees of complex hegemony" (1987, 5). The contemporary fictions discussed in this article are suggestive of how new representation can be achieved through articulating unheard stories, marginalized voices, and also questioning the static history of the orient itself. As Morey and Yaqin observe, "there is a gap existing between representation and reality" (2015, 1). In this regard, these alternative fictional modes of representations must be identified as a literary and political response to the othering of Arabs in a post-9/11 context. This requires cultural engagements with the West.

Zuzana Tabačková notes that "September 11 attacks mark the beginning of a post September 11 reader who becomes interested in works written by Anglophone Arab writers whose names begin to appear more frequently in American bookstores" (2015, 209). It is clearly indicated that prior to 9/11 the Arab American authors were not given sufficient significance in the American literary landscape. Consequently, 9/11 brought cultural, political, and literary changes, and the dire situation forced Arab Americans to speak and make themselves visible. Alameddine, by quoting from several sources and merging numerous forms, styles, and content, affirms that what defines the Western and the Eastern borders is merely fiction. The deconstructive method he employs enunciates a rejection of binarism and prejudice. He assumes that the issues of the Arabs and also the West lie in the stories that are sometime seen as ideologies. For

him, stories are merely fiction and do not reflect reality, since every story is a mere creation of the "Hakawati" whose aim is to gain some money by devising and telling stories. In his attitude, he conforms to what Edward Said pointed out that the East and the West are only fictional constructions (Said, 2002) and the encounter between these two poles has to be expanded. In *Once in a Promised Land*, Laila Halaby depicts the disillusionment that carried Jassim and Salwa into believing that they are attaining the American dream. Jassim is professional enough to achieve his American dream, but he is unfortunately rejected and denied access to the zone of American dream once he is identified as an Arab. The novel rather draws the Arab Americans to the realities of their presence in the United States.

Today diaspora writers and their hyphenated and hybrid identities attempt to bridge the gap that exists between cultures. The hybridity in their literary production could be seen as a significant point from which a dialogue can begin with the creation of what Homi Bhabha termed as the 'third space'. Such a dialogue should necessarily bring about a restructuring of this notion, apart from Orientalist discourse. As it is employed in Bhabha's postcolonial theory to encounter the persistent hierarchies, existing polarities, and symmetries between the East and the West, the concept of 'third space' could also serve the project of de-orientalizing the Arab. The interaction between the Arab culture and the American culture has

been stagnant since 9/11. Even any attempt to approach anything produced by Arabs is shadowed by prejudice and seen from a biased perspective. To break the ground of such cloudy relationship, 'third space' that is manifested in the Anglophone Arab fiction would smash the chains of loneliness that has been imposed on the Arab world. Hybrid in nature and having no predetermined politics or ideologies, such fiction would set a fresh ground on which further interactions between the two sides may flourish. Situated in 'the third space' would mean avoiding the perpetuation of antagonistic binarisms and constructing inclusionary and plural patterns of cultural exchange. Most of the characters in *Once in a Promised*, *The Hakawati*, and *The Night Counter* are naturally hybrid characters attempting to understand who they are as a mixture of different ethnicities and cultures. These characters carry a sense of ambivalence and in-betweenness as their hybrid identities are interposed in a space that goes between the center and margin. Despite the tension that may result from such a situation, hybridity can contribute to bridging the gaps between different cultures and thus, bringing them closer together in a mutual dialogue.

It is through such characters that understanding and intercultural interaction can come to existence. We can say that for such characters the pull of homeland and the charm of the host culture parallel each other. In such cases, the demand for 'the third space' is essential, since

through this space Arabs can find an opening for de-orientalizing their culture and confronting the dehumanizing stereotypes. By carving a space for themselves, they can counter, refute, and also offer authentic representations of themselves and the places they come from. To de-orientalize the Arab, it is very important to first develop intercultural understanding and construct a hybrid transnational identity. Alameddine's *The Hakawti* took the lead in initiating this project where the major characters celebrate being part of the American culture and the Arab one. The novel calls and invites the reader for intercultural dialogue. *The Night Counter* is also part of this project as it does not only stress the necessity of cross-cultural interaction, but also attempts to de-orientalize the Arab from within. In this sense, Anglophone Arab fiction offers Arab Americans an alternative space in which they can voice and narrate their own stories of life, to express themselves better to the American society, and also to imagine themselves as an important component of the American society, American literatures, and cultures.

As there is incessant move to radicalize Arab American culture, Arab Americans are supposed to create new form of self-representation. Despite the exciting flourishing of Arab American artistic and cultural venues, Fadda-Conrey realizes that "there still exist serious impediments to the flow and mobility of transnational enactments of identities" (2014, 183). Alia Yunis's novel

in a charming way provides us with disruptive appropriations as well as cultural relocations, depicting a whole range of the Arab American community. By adopting redemptive strategies, anti-nostalgic and celebratory embrace of various cultural flows that make up Arab American plurality, Yunis intends to mitigate the ongoing tensions within and between both Arab and American realities. The intersecting stories that she weaves in her novel open up a space for producing new intercultural understandings through the mobile flow of people between and across multiple and intersecting sites of identification and cultural expression. Hence, Alia Yunis offers us a trans-cultural narrative that does not only encompass the techniques form The Arabian Nights but also attempts to reverse the Orientalist image of Arabs in the United States from potential terrorism suspects into mere fictional representations.

Not only did September 11 fan the flames of Islamophobia in the United States, it also initiated a sort of a cultural renaissance of Arab and Muslim Americans. Despite despondency and apprehension exhibited against Arabs and Muslims, Ella Shohat and Evelyn Alsultany state that "the East has become increasingly interwoven into the American cultural fabric" (2013, 10). This is observed in Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land*, and Alia Yunis's *The Night Counter*, two pieces of literature that weave the East and the West altogether. In *Once in a Promised Land*, the reader is introduced to two

cultures, familiar yet different, depicting varied aspects of living in a country that seems foreign and familiar as well. In *The Night Counter*, the reader comes across the history and stories of a multi-generational family that is exposed to the American life and culture more than the Arab one. Yunis attempts to tackle the issues of misrepresentations by invoking Scheherazade and giving her a contemporary personality. In doing so, Yunis aims at gaining access to the mainstream American culture where Scheherazade of *The Arabian Nights* is misrepresented, sexualized, and commercialized. Yunis also emphasizes on the cultural mobility which characterizes the third generation Arab Americans. The mobile flow of people between and across multiple landscapes and signposts that she depicts in the novel reflects her intended cultural expression. She succeeds in offering an intercultural text that embodies not only storytelling techniques of *The Arabian Nights*, but also a text that turns the Arab image in America from terror- suspects into violence-abhorrent citizens; human beings who socialize and need to interact with their communities like any other people. Anglophone Arab literature is today a medium through which Americans can gain better understanding and knowledge of the spiritual and intellectual make-up of Arabs and Arab Americans. It is in this literature that Americans can find authentic representations of Arabs much better than those in journalism, political memoirs, or historical reports.

To dispel the stereotypes, Arab and Arab Americans have to invest in defining themselves rather than waiting for others to define them. Fadda-Conrey recognizes the absence of Arab Americans in the Cultural and Ethnic Studies canon (2014, 175), and here she refers to the problem of institutionalizing since Arab American Studies has not been established as a field. To de-orientalize the Arab, there is a need to go beyond Orientalism and counter-discourses as these remain an obstacle for surpassing the stereotypes. Stereotypes take much time to wither away, therefore, Arabs and Arab American can alternatively create new cultural forms of representation. According to Schmidt, "writing against Orientalism continues to reinforce the prevalence of the concept while in addition preventing new approaches from flourishing" (2014, 41). The autobiographies discussed in this article resist the generalized abstractions of Arabs and Arab Americans, but the discursive strategies employed seem insufficient. Jack Shaheen attributed the constant reemerging of stereotypes to the lack of knowledge about Arabs and Arab Americans and he suggested ways the media, trough detailed and balanced information procurement, can draw an alternative frame around the Arab (1984, 126). This necessitates developing an interdisciplinary methodology of media and literary studies, in particular, for restructuring the 'self' and breaking away from the Orientalist legacy. Schmidt contends that "in order to change the image of the Arab oil sheikh or the belly-dancing harem girl, alternative representations

of the Arabs cannot completely ignore former stereotypes; instead, they have to trigger positive evaluations on the basis of new and more detailed information" (2014, 114). Her view is that instead of the pure conflicting dichotomies of counter-discourses, discursive rivalries, as developed by Gary Fine, imply the plurality of discourses. Hence, the redefinition of the Arab American identity is a complementation rather than a confrontation.

Conclusion

The article explores some of the narrative strategies that Arab American novelists employ in constructing their identities and reversing the Orientalist stereotypes. The textual analysis reveals that works of fiction produced by the Anglophone Arab writers under examination here can establish bridges of trust and offer opportunities of intercultural understanding in a post-9/11 context. The novels offer new representations of contemporary Arab Americans struggling to author their own identities in the wake of the attacks and to negotiate changed cultural and political contexts. There is an obsession with family history and storytelling which indicates the need for redefining the 'self' and creating histories. Alameddine is keen on providing multifaceted characters of diverse backgrounds, while Halaby invests much effort in presenting the experiences of Arab Americans and exposing the realities imposed after 9/11. Alameddine's

approach is rather celebratory not of the Middle Eastern cultures alone but of western cultures as well. Halaby, on the contrary, portrays the bleak picture of being an Arab in post 9/11 era. Her strategy is boldly counter-narrative, while Alameddine's is mostly deconstructive. They both employ metafictional devices to involve the reader more in dismembering the layers of the narrative. In Yunis' novel, there is a necessity to transcend a binary thinking and also a suggestion for addressing the issues of integration and hyphenation of identity. Responding to the attempts of disfiguring one's identity, *The Night Counter* stresses that distancing one's self from one's religion or culture cannot happen easily. Instead, the novel urges Arab Americans who initiate such desperate and pathetic attempts to try to embrace both cultures and pronounce them all with confidence and pride. To de-orientalize their culture, Arab Americans have to create multiple modes of authentic representation. The view presented in *The Night Counter* is that Arab Americans have to terminate disguising, covering themselves, and seeking a better agent or a better heritage. What they should do is to re-examine their heritage and benefit from stories like Scheherazade's. To further explain how they can imitate Scheherazade, Muhsin al-Musawi emphasizes that "Scheherazade succeeds in "defusing the morose king's vindictive […] plan by deploying a "counter-narrative" that "works within the parameters of Islamic faith" (2009, 77). *The Night Counter* envisions a culture that is not seen as Oriental despotism or Is-

lamic terror, but it rather proposes a plural view that can accommodate various experiences of numerous ethnicities, races, and sexual orientations. Celebrating cultural differences and undermining the nostalgia deployed by some characters, *The Night Counter* strives to ventilate the tension created by the numerous realities imposed upon Arab Americans.

NOTES:

1. 'Hakawati' in Arabic means a teller of tales, myths, and fables, an entertainer, a highly skilled storyteller or fibster. It is an ancient art of storytelling in Arabic; an oral tradition with rich repertoire.

2. Scheherazade is a mythical heroine in the classic Arabian Nights. She is invoked in The Night Counter as a counter-narrative strategy and an attempt to de-orientalize the Arab from within. Most of the images associated with Scheherazade are those of the belly-dancer and half-naked Eastern woman.

3. Said argues that Arabic literature is 'embargoed' as it remains relatively unknown and unread in the West for certain geopolitical reasons. Said points out that Arabic is considered as a controversial language, and the embargo on Arabic literature reflects the Western perceptions of Arab nations

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Reconfiguring Discourses of Human Rights and Development in Arundhati Roy's The Ministry of Utmost Happiness

Crystal Baines

The increased failure of the protection of human rights in South Asia has led this region to view the very concept of human rights with some suspicion. Communal tensions persisting since the colonial period, civil wars, extreme measures of censorship, and abuse of power often instigated by governments that comply with a neoliberal global economy call into question the purpose and effectivity of especially international agents of human rights within the region. Certain religio-political factions frequently demand the expulsion of social justice and

rights-based international NGOs and liberal humanitarian projects since they are viewed as 'foreign' and 'inappropriate' to South Asia specific socio-cultural issues. It is easy to discount human rights as a Euro-American concept which in the post-cold war global economy has conflated into liberal humanitarianism. Such liberal humanitarianisms, according to Crystal Parikh, "evacuates political subjectivity and social desire from those whom it addresses, ascribing to them instead abject victimhood" (2017, 3). The implication of this form of humanitarianism is that the prerequisite to victimhood is the obscuration of the individual's right to have rights and the simplistic acknowledgment of victims as human beings that need saving. Are critics of human rights in the global south, then, justified in their claims that the liberal humanitarian narratives are condescending of the population they purport to save and unsuitable for the multifaceted problems specific to the same regions they presume to solve? It goes without saying, that this discourse of liberal humanitarianism does drastically reconfigure itself in its adopted geo-political landscapes outside Euro-American shores. But what happens to human rights, its discourse and to liberal humanitarianism within postcolonial and decolonial discourses of development in South Asia? This paper explores the complex reconfigurations of liberal humanitarianism and human rights within South Asian neoliberal development narratives depicted in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017). I consider how the narrative of

the white (western) man's new burden, when replaced with the developing brown man's burden of national development in India, reconfigures or completely rejects the supposedly alien discourse of western human rights within postcolonial and decolonial trajectories of globalization.

In the process of these reconfigurations, the narrative considers new, or reconsiders already existing conceptualizations of human rights obliterated by hegemonic discourses of colonialism. As Parikh acknowledges, human rights discourse after all, has become globalized in scope, and it is "increasingly "pluralized" in texture, as human rights instruments have come to address the plight of particular groups that are considered in need of distinct care" (2017, 5). In this sense, deprecating human rights as entirely western is not only hazardous, but it also rules out the possibility of vibrant and effective local rights movements to emerge, the way it does in the novel. For instance, Roy in her descriptions of the development and urbanization projects of twenty first century neoliberal Delhi that strives to shed deprecating epithets such as "developing" and "Third World", brings to the fore new possibilities of imagining human rights according to changing economic policies. As such, this paper specifically focuses on Roy's query into the development projects that engulf the city of Delhi, resulting in drastic and irrevocable changes in the city's demography. The novel's microscopic view of the human collateral damage in macroscopic neoliberal devel-

opment projects of the megapolis invites the reader to question the very conceptualization of "development" in the so called "Third World" setting. In this context it is important to consider the "development projects" and the violence they inflict on certain citizens in terms of neoliberal political and economic rationality, which according to Wendy Brown, emerges as "governmentality – a mode of governance encompassing but not limited to the state, and one that produces subjects, forms of citizenship and behaviour, and new organization of the social" (2003, 37). This paper later focuses on a dissenting "new organization of the social" produced as resistance by neoliberal configurations of power. This "new organization" and its subjects titled 'Jannat' in the novel traverses with the socio-economic trends of neoconservatism, right-wing triumphalism, and consumerism, envisioning the possibility of a utopic space within and without neoliberal governmentality. But first, since Delhi's development projects feature as visible signs of the neoliberal socio-economic order in the novel, I find useful to read development, as Arturo Escobar (1995) suggests, as a discourse of power. When read in this framework, development projects geared towards the "supercapital" (Roy 2017, 100) megapolis model are often revealed to be nefarious enterprises, endorsed by "a powerful weave of nationalism, neoliberalism, and postcolonialism" (Kaul 2019, 3) that weed out the urban subaltern who is more a hindrance than an asset to the neoliberal free market economy.

In *Encountering Development* (1995), Arturo Escobar argues that although development is now a certainty in the social imaginary as the only means to solve social and economic problems, the idea of the "Third World" in particular, "has been produced by the discourses and practices of development since their inception in the early post- world war II period" (1995, 4). He suggests that considering development as a discourse of power and language system makes it possible to maintain focus on domination and the pervasive effects of development. Scaffolding his argument on Foucault's reasoning of discourse analysis, he remarks that discourse analysis creates the possibility of "stand[ing] detached from [the development discourse], bracketing its familiarity, in order to analyze the theoretical and practical context with which it has been associated" (Foucault 1986, 3); it gives one the possibility of singling out "development" as an encompassing cultural space and, at the same time, of separating oneself from it by perceiving it in a totally new form (Escobar 1995, 6).

Accordingly, in reading the novel, I first consider the physical violence wrought by the development schemes on the lower class and socio-culturally peripheral citizens of the city. I then go on to argue that the narrative's principal characters in Jannat, Anjum, Tilo, and Miss Udaya Jabeen, in physically and figuratively "separating" themselves from the encompassing cultural space of development, offer renewed liberal humanitarian

discourses of resistance that emerge against and within modernizing systems of development that dehumanize the poor. The narrative suggests that the singular focus on international or nationalist rights interventions is futile, since both the international and local apparatuses of welfare and human rights are ultimately dependent upon and therefore complicit in the narrow neoliberal visions of modernization and development. Instead the narrative's focus on cultural and social nonconformists offers new humanitarian imaginaries of equity and ethics.

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness is a sprawling kaleidoscopic view of socio-political views pertaining to urban north India. The novel maps the many collective and individual resistance movements as casualties of the postcolonial, neoliberal, national project to make India "the world's favorite new superpower" (Roy 2017, 100). However, there are no victims among the main characters. Instead what the novel envisions, as the title suggests, is a cultural utopia embodied in a local community of the "Unconsoled"[1]. One can identify two main narrative strands among many within this utopic space: one revolves around Anjum, a formidable and motherly hijra, who after living for a while with a small transgender community in Old Delhi goes off to live in a graveyard where she is gradually joined by a motley group of social rejects to establish a guest house cum funeral parlour called 'Jannat'. Among those she is joined by is recluse social justice activist Tilottama. Tilo, a former

architecture student from Kerala and the three men in love with her, form the second narrative of the novel. During a visit to her former lover Musa, a Kashmiri militant fighting for Azadi, Tilo finds herself entrenched in the long-standing territorial conflict when she is captured by Indian forces. The two women's narratives offer a mediatory view of the various modes and state apparatuses that dehumanize individuals that already occupy the margins of Indian society. The other significant storylines that entwine with that of the two women are that of Saddam Hussein, a Dalit disguised as a Muslim to escape upper caste Hindutva persecution, and Comrade Revathy, a Maoist (she only appears in the form of a missive from the grave) from Andhra Pradesh, whose daughter Miss Udaya Jabeen, begotten by a police gang rape, is adopted by Anjum and Tilo. The characters make a clear distinction between 'Jannat'[2], their home of socio-cultural deviants, and 'Duniya'[3], the world that wants nothing to do with them. The novel's central locus in Delhi provides a commentary on how burgeoning problems specific to India are aggravated by neoliberal economic policies that tout urban based economic development as a national project and solution to heteronormative class and caste driven struggles and anxieties of the marginal.

The social, political, and economic setting of the story is a contradictory confluence of what Nitasha Kaul refers to as PNN, "postcolonial neoliberal nationalism",

which functions as governmentality in the context of India (Kaul 2019, 6). She argues that "hegemonic projects, such as those of the right wing in the present, owe their success to how they weave together what are generally perceived to be contradictory aspects of nationalism and neoliberalism" (Kaul 2019, 6). It is a confluence where neoliberal practices get legitimized "as a matter of nationalist pride for they are deemed to enable the "rise" of postcolonial India" (Kaul 2019, 7). In present day India, PNN is governmentality that wants to emulate the West in terms of neoliberal policies but keeps it at bay in terms of ideas of secularism. It is a model, as depicted in the novel, that dismantles the welfare state, retrenches civil liberties, annuls environmental protections, and disregards the secular codes of law by reinforcing a Hindutva state. Such hegemonic projects inevitably exclude a majority that does not fit within the PNN framework, thus widening the categories of the subaltern in the postcolonial neoliberal nation. Central to Roy's scattershot polemics against breaches of justice and inequality is the Jannat community's humanity. The nonlinear fragmentation of the narrative is often metaphorically reflected in the fragmentation of persona and diminished humanity in a city that receives a facelift in neoliberal modernization.

In the chapter titled "The Nativity" which marks the baby, Miss Udaya Jabeen's timely advent in a furore of protests in Jantar Mantar, New Delhi, the peripheral hu-

man, political, and economic entities (from Jannat) converge with their neoliberal fundamentalist persecutors (from Duniya). On this day, Miss Udaya Jabeen's mother, Comrade Revathy leaves her on the pavements of Jantar Mantar with the hope that one of "the many good people at Jantar Mantar" (Roy 2017, 431) would take care of her. Coincidentally, Anjum, driven by "her long-standing desire to "help the poor" organizes a trip to the same location to "see for themselves what the "Second Freedom Struggle" the TV channels had been broadcasting was all about" (Roy 2017, 111). Roy manipulates the central location of Jantar Mantar to offer a tour guide-like commentary of the expanding city, pockmarked with numerous infrastructural development projects. She humanizes the city in disturbingly feminized imagery:

> Gray flyovers snaked out of her Medusa skull, tangling and untangling under the yellow sodium haze. Sleeping bodies of homeless people lined their… pavements…*Old secrets were folded into the furrows of her loose parchment skin. Each wrinkle was a street, each street a carnival. Each arthritic joint a crumbling amphitheater where stories of love and madness, stupidity, delight and unspeakable cruelty was played out for centuries. But this was the dawn of her resurrection*. Her new masters wanted to hide her knobby, varicose veins under the imported fishnet stockings, cram her withered tits into saucy padded bras and jam her aching feet into pointed high-heeled shoes... It was the summer Grandma became a whore. (Roy 2017, 100, emphasis added)

The narrative adopts a sexist male gaze to represent the city as an ailing old woman straining under the weight of centuries long colonial plunder and decades long national capitalist modernization. The simultaneous humanization, objectification, and demonization of the city paint a disturbing image of an old woman battered by violent historical assault, and whose mangled body is now receiving a painful makeover to be prostituted to a new master with new, though equally exploitative demands. The humanization of the city as a grandmother, already abused, and whose body is prepared for further molestation heightens the gravity of the exploitation and environmental damage that occur within the national neoliberal framework. The artificial makeover of rapid infrastructural development indicates the superficiality and fragility of ad hoc plush development that really does nothing in eradicating the socioeconomic problems of the country. "Her knobby varicose veins" and other physical defects refer to the poor and the slums in the city (Roy 2017, 100). Poverty – mirrored in slum and squalor – is an ugly blot on the shiny veneer of a neoliberal cityscape. The state's plaster-solution to the abhorrent visibility of poverty is forceful eviction and demolition:

> "People who can't afford to live in cities shouldn't come here," a Supreme Court Judge said, and ordered the immediate eviction of the city's poor. […] So surplus people were banned. In addition to the

> regular police, several battalions of the Rapid Action Force […] were deployed in the poorer quarters. (Roy 2017, 102)

Neoliberalism is thus a space project, which produces not just economic but also spatial unevenness that impacts the biopolitics of the city and village scape. Changing space relations and biopolitics reconfigure the very conceptualization of humanity and citizenship since it produces a surplus of people that is stumbling block to the spatial and corporate expansion of the city "to become supercapital of the world's favorite new superpower" (Roy 2017, 100). In a profit driven environment, a surplus of people that cannot contribute to furthering the economic agenda of the international and domestic capitalist class, while taking up valuable space i. e. profitable real estate, is not only a hindrance but also disposable. Relocation for the "surplus people" equals disposability by death: "'Where shall we go?' the surplus people asked. 'You can kill us, but we won't move,' they said. There were too many of them to be killed outright' " (Roy 2017, 102). Hence, the makeover is demonstrative of the more insidious effects of neoliberal development which not only projects its development agenda as solution to the problems of underdevelopment while exacerbating economic inequality in India, but also reinforces what Gayatri Spivak calls a "classed apartheid" (2004, 529) in a lethal form that sanctions institutionalized killing.

As the narrative progresses, Roy's creative voice merges with that of the activist, as she strips metaphor and simile to describe the ruthless impact of development-oriented neoliberalism on the non-capitalist human being. It is her focus on development's collateral human damage that enables the reader to distance herself from development and consider it as a discourse of power. She writes, "away from the lights and advertisements, villages were being emptied. Cities too. Millions of people were being moved, but nobody knew where to" (Roy 2017, 102). Given the adverse effects of the beautification project on those that distort the outer-markings of the neoliberal economic veneer, the state is met with lower class resistance: "In slums and squatter settlements…people fought back" (Roy 2017, 102). But resistance in turn is countered with either palliatives or extreme repression: "Across the road, […] the police and bulldozers were lined up for the final assault" (Roy 2017, 102). Kaul refers to such situations as the "politics of the absurd" (Kaul 2019, 12). She argues that the postcolonial neoliberal nation co-constructs the idea of the nation and the economy as a strategy of governmentality that creates a political subjectivity that can no longer question the conditions of neoliberalism. Nationalism, in the national development project, she writes,

> […] gets mobilized as a natural part of the affective politics, while questions of ideologies, distribution of wealth, survival, and/or livelihood that ought to

> be central to politics are put into the "safe house" of economy beyond the realm of public debate. […] What is more, the technocratically determined idea of rationality in governance makes conflicts of interests become unidentifiable. That which is most obviously in view becomes structured in such a manner that it is naturalized and rendered obscure from questioning. (Kaul 2019, 12-13)

The ideal subject of this postcolonial nation-state is the one who accepts without questioning the postcolonial neoliberal nation of governmentality. The PNN model of governmentality thus not only creates a new form of urban subalternity but also depends on its survival and perpetuation on this same subalternity. The narrative's investment in neoliberal subalternity considers the human being not merely as organic entity but also as a structural unit, defined and sustained by a sovereign state:

> There were too many of them to be killed outright. Instead their homes, their doors and windows, their makeshift roofs, their pots and pans, their plates, their spoons, *their school leaving certificates, their ration cards, their marriage certificates,[…]their lifetime's work*, the expression in their eyes, were flattened by the yellow bulldozers imported from Australia. […]They could flatten history and stack it up like building material. (Roy 2017, 103, emphasis added)

The forceful evictions are simply not a matter of displacement, space contention and loss of human life, but it is also an obliteration of the non-capitalist individual's political subjecthood. The destruction of vital administrative records is a denial of citizenship. The insidious disenfranchisement that follows physical displacement acquits the state of all responsibility towards the citizen of no economic and electoral value. The erasure of citizenship is thus contradictory even to the American and Western European development discourses that historically projected capitalism as a moralizing venture, where profit-making was promoted as a righteous method to reduce the income gap. The arbitrary deprivation of nationality is expressly prohibited in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the document and discourse that the capitalist enterprise presumes to uphold (UN 1948, Article 15). The political ideology of justice that accompanied the huge structural inequalities of the post-cold war economic system in this instance is blatantly violated in the Indian development narrative.

However, this is not to say that the liberal humanitarian narrative is entirely absent from development discourse. It is just that it exists only for the human who has capital, who can borrow credit and consume. Following the evictions of the now homeless, stateless non-citizen subalterns of Delhi, Roy writes, "And people (who counted as people) said to one another, 'You don't have to go abroad for shopping anymore. Imported things are available here now. See, like Bombay is our New York,

Delhi is our Washington and Kashmir is our Switzerland' " (2017, 103). New York, Washington and Switzerland stand here as metonymy for First World developed status which the postcolonial neoliberal consumer wishes to import and appropriate. According to Molly Geidel in Peace Corps Fantasies (2015), "what is most irresistible about development fantasies is modernization's promise of homosocial intimacy through participation in capitalist relations" (2015, ix). But to expose the interstices of this deeply rooted social and economic fallacy, Escobar encourages us to consider development discourse in its historical context. He writes:

> To see development as a historically produced discourse entails an examination of why so many countries started to see themselves as underdeveloped in the early post–World War II period, how "to develop" became a fundamental problem for them, and how, finally, they embarked upon the task of "un-underdeveloping" themselves by subjecting their societies to increasingly systematic, detailed, and comprehensive interventions. (Escobar 1995, 6)

The post-World War II American and western European initiative in taking to task the white man's new burden to modernize and develop the less economically accomplished countries, considered economic development as the primary measure for social welfare. This is a premise first based on the perception of certain conditions and economic systems in Asia and Africa as "backward",

"unscientific" and "stagnant". For instance, successive governments of post-independence India and Sri Lanka in the 1940s and '50s proposed resolutions for economic and political governance based on secular socialist models. Such proposals were unsuccessful due to political complacency, narrow-visioned electoral strategies and policy errors. The neoliberal capitalist model emulated by America especially from the late 1970s was perceived as the democratic model that posed under the banner of freedom. The minimization of state regulation on economic systems was perceived as liberty that fostered international equal relations and moral social standing (Bhardan 1984; Kelegama 2000; Mukherji 2009). In her sprawling description of the New Delhi cityscape, Roy facetiously notes, "Kmart was coming. Walmart and Starbucks were coming, and in the British Airways advertisement on TV, the People of the World (white, brown, black, yellow) all chanted Gayatri Mantra" (2017, 101). Kaul points out a fallacy of development specific to India's postcolonial condition. She writes, that the appeal of the postcolonial neoliberal project derives from "the promise of a future where the healing of the colonial wound can only be complete by achieving a level of consumption and lifestyle "like the West"" (Kaul, 2019, 12). The argument here is: "what the west consumes we have a right to consume as well". Open economic policies, hence, not only pushed South Asia into the rat race of modern globalization but it also thrives to mimic and appropriate the popular cultural and economic symbol-

ism of the west as a visible albeit superficial manifestation of liberty and equality.

Indeed, the liberal and neoliberal premise that deregulation of the economy facilitates globalization and equity was made on a moral high ground scaffolded upon a human rights discourse beginning post World War II. Not unlike the Western development discourse that specially promoted the American "good life" as the aspirational model to the rest of the world, moral and ethical criteria of the protection of human dignity was chartered in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights under American tutelage. However, as Parikh observes, American liberalism and neoliberalism, which have enjoyed global hegemony since 1989, "and their interfaces with the international human rights regime…have rendered an alternative genealogy of human rights fragmented and scattered in terms of any *political movement*" (2017, 8). It is in this context that she notes in the conflation of the human rights discourse with liberal humanitarianism, a crucial distinction that must be made in terms of recognizing and retaining the redeeming potential of human rights. Costas Douzinas in his essay, "Seven Theses of Human Rights" writes, that "the (implicit) promise to the developing world is that the violent or voluntary adoption of the market-led, neoliberal model of good governance and limited rights will inexorably lead to Western economic standards" (2013). It is this same unregulated, duplicitous neoliberal humanitarianism and

development that *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* encourages one to reconsider. I consider below how the development narrative often overlaps with the neoliberal humanitarian discourse in the novel to the extent that their conflation is indistinguishable.

Having followed the human evictions from the New Delhi slums and squatter settlements with the precision and outrage of an activist, Roy turns one's attention to how the state and international regimes respond to the blatant human rights violations wrought by the city's state sanctioned beautification project. Firstly, the narrative refers to a random but concerned Christian priest, highlighting the grassroots religious and social conscience and appeal for justice: "Father-John-for-the-Weak sent out a letter saying that, according to police records, almost three thousand unidentified dead bodies (human) had been found on the city's streets last year. Nobody replied" (Roy 2017, 103). This is not to suggest that international and domestic networks of capitalist neoliberal proponents are completely oblivious to the loss of shelter, income, citizenship, lives and humanhood of the city's poor. In fact the novel notes that corporate sponsored "competitive TV channels covered the story of the breaking city in "Breaking News"… they asked the poor what it was like to be poor…The TV channels never ran out of sponsorship for their live telecast of despair" (Roy 2017, 103). On the contrary, there is a large-scale dramatization of poverty that func-

tions as diversion from the cause for poverty. The very same neoliberal framework responsible for the problems, creates a disjuncture between itself and its victims in disguising itself in the garb of humanitarian concern. It is the perfect alibi for the nefarious effects wrought by neoliberal development. But what is more insidious about the publicity that poverty receives is that it serves as advertisement for what-not-to-become: poor and underdeveloped. Projection of poverty as despair and squalor is psychological blackmail of the upper middle class that sustains itself on credit-driven consumerism. The humanitarian rhetoric that magnifies the problems of the poor, thus, not only cloaks the fissures in the system but also manipulates the despair it has created to its own economic advantage. Furthermore, institutionalized humanitarianism couches the disposability of the poor in a rhetoric that still objectifies the poor as collateral damage and human debris— a necessary sacrifice by the Indian state for the greater good and equity of the consumer class: "Experts aired their expert opinions for a fee: Somebody has to pay the price for Progress, they said expertly" (Roy 2017, 103). What is more alarming, to me personally, was to find this same rhetoric mirrored in the language of development literature of the United Nations:

> There is a sense in which rapid economic progress is impossible without painful adjustments. Ancient philosophies have to be scrapped; old social institu-

> tions have to disintegrate; bonds of caste, creed and race have to burst; and *large numbers of persons who cannot keep up with progress have to have their expectations of a comfortable life frustrated. Very few communities are willing to pay the full price of economic progress*.
>
> — United Nations, Department of Social and Economic Affairs, Measures for the Economic Development of Underdeveloped Countries, 1951(cited in Escobar 1995, 4; emphasis added)

Escobar cites the above as "one of the most influential documents of the period, prepared by a group of experts convened by the United Nations with the objective of designing concrete policies and measures 'for the economic development of underdeveloped countries'" (Escobar 4). The report modeled after the Harry Truman's vision of the '50s which initiated a new era of understanding and management of world affairs, through extending American support to less economically successful countries, specifically reflects the method by which the "American dream of peace and abundance be extended to all the peoples of the planet" (Escobar 2017, 4). The capitalist humanitarian discourse clearly attributes poverty to personal failure rather than systematic constraints and institutionalized violence.

I find Escobar's method of viewing development as a discourse of power relations useful in distinguishing hegemonic humanitarian regimes from the emancipato-

ry communities, imaginaries, and narratives in the text. Thinking of neoliberal humanitarianism as a discourse helps focus on processes by which it draws on imperialist models and becomes complicit in the neoliberal economic agenda. The community of Jannat however, in their physical and figurative distance from the tumult of development confronts hegemonic discourses and systems of language that exclude beings, especially the human and/or subaltern that does not fit into specific dominant economic and ideological systems of development. Instead, it offers a refreshingly curious reverse-discourse on the upholding of one's rights through diverse empathy.

A few weeks after Anjum and Tilo adopt a baby from Jantar Mantar, they receive a letter from her biological mother Revathy, a lower caste militant Maoist, who has just been killed by government forces. In the letter she writes, "In the forest everyday police is burning, killing, raping poor people. Outside there is you people to fight and take up issues" (Roy 2017, 431). Her letter is neither addressed to the government nor any form of institutionalized human rights organization. It is addressed to Anjum, a transgender woman; Tilo, a Keralite activist of dubious inter-caste origins; Saddam Hussein, a converted Dalit; and to a motely group of social rejects that live in Jannat, a guest house cum funeral parlour in a Delhi graveyard. Anjum and Saddam Hussein, the co-founders of the funeral parlour determine that, "The one clear

criterion was that Jannat Funeral Services would only bury those whom the graveyards and imams of the Duniya had rejected" (Roy 2017, 84). As indicative of the collective's name, 'Jannat' (paradise), Roy envisions a utopia for the "people who do not count as people" because they do not fit into heteronormative, neoliberal, national, capitalist discourse. She manipulates her role as writer to exercise her poetic license in imagining what is near impossible. According to Bill Ashcroft and Lyman Sargent, utopia is no longer a place but "the spirit of hope itself", the essence of the desire for a better world (Sargent 2000; Ashcroft 2012). And according to Frederic Jameson, 'practical thinking', especially in the postcolonial context, represents a surrender to the system. For Jameson, "the Utopian idea, on the contrary, keeps alive the possibility of a world qualitatively distinct from this one and takes the form of a stubborn negation of all this" (Jameson 1971, 110-111). The novel's metatextual awareness of the utopic nature of Jannat is evident when the hijras make a distinction between their own world and what they call the "Duniya" or the mainstream society conditioned by upper-caste, heteronormative neoliberal capitalist ethics that treat those who do not fit the systemic criteria as non-human or human debris. But "practical thinking" and "economic realities" aside, Ashcroft observes that "postcolonial writing is suffused with future thinking…[with] a belief in the reality of liberation, in the possibility of justice and equality, in the transformative power of writing and

at times in the potential global impact to be made by postcolonial societies" (2012, 2). Within the formation of Jannat the novel explores the ethical, moral and etymological conditions in which alternative economic and political communities can emerge as possible solution and rejoinder to neoliberal economy and institutional humanitarianism.

The novel is acutely aware of the skepticism that such alternative discourses and envisionings could be met with. During their field trip to New Delhi's Jantar Mantar, the Jannat crowd, in their conspicuously deviant appearance, draws the attention of two young filmmakers who were "making a documentary film about Protest and Resistance" (Roy 2017, 114):

> […] [O]ne of the recurring themes of the film was to have protestors say, "Another World is Possible".[…] Anjum, for her part, completely uncomprehending, stared into the camera. […]We've come from there […]from the other world. The young film-makers […] exchanged glances and decided to move on rather than try to explain what they meant because it would take too long. (Roy 2017, 114)

While this brief encounter offers a critique of the fashionable NGO funded international humanitarian art projects that have no impact beyond the financial gain and superficial individual recognition that the artist receives often at the expense of underprivileged misery,

Roy points out the tendency of the mainstream understanding to view the prevailing dominant economic and cultural discourse as the only certainty.

The scripted slogan and Anjum's reaction to it is also reflective of the distinction between utopia and utopianism. According to Ashcroft and Ernst Bloch, utopianism is a process, it is the energizing of the present with the anticipation of what is to come. (Ashcroft 2012; Bloch 1988). In postcolonial literary visions such as Jannat, utopia can be a "geographical region, a culture, a local community, a racial identity, conceived in a disruption of conventional boundaries…" (Ashcroft 2012, 6). For the filmmakers "another world" is still a process, a possibility of what could be, while for Anjum "another world" is already achieved utopia because of her sense of empathy. Anjum's way of envisioning the possibility of resistance through empathy is an alternative that the middle-class consciousness cannot imagine or recognize, since empathy is an affect at complete logger heads with the individualism which the capitalist economy thrives on.

Parikh in *Writing Human Rights* elaborates on the theory of the obligation to the Other, based on the premise that we as individuals in a society have an ethical responsibility specifically towards the Other. This sense of obligation she argues, which arises from a point of empathetic discomfort, facilitates an active implementation of dor-

mant human rights literacy. The ethical critique she proposes here subsists on the alienating or disarming effect that the Other induces in one. She suggests that one's sense of personal responsibility towards the Other arises "with a certain discomfort with our skin, the difficulty of 'living (at home) with ourselves' when brushed by the Other who is the impossible subject of rights" (Parikh 2017, 87). By "Impossible Subject" she means, "the subject for whom political justice and legal redress remain unavailable, but whose claims impel the ethical project of human rights politics nevertheless" (Parikh 2017, 86-87). It is this same sense of empathy evoked from an acute awareness of your own comfort zone in contrast to another's despair that prevails in Anjum's graveyard community. After having listened to Comrade Revathy's letter of the cultural, societal and institutional violence unleashed upon the Adivasi communities and the harrowing experience of her rape, "Each of the [Revathy's] listeners recognized, in their own separate ways, something of themselves and their own stories…" (Roy 2017, 432). Furthermore, the plausibility of empathy arising out of stark difference salvages Jannat from appearing a naively idealistic literary trope.

In addition to this, Anjum actively rejects two principal positions ascribed to her by the national neoliberal development discourse: the victim and the subaltern. During her years as a performing hijra at the Khwabgah in Old Delhi (a small hovel ghetto of hijras), Anjum is

celebrated and sought after for her striking appearance, charisma, and eloquence by NGOs and documentary filmmakers, who construct a new knowledge of academic orientalism for the consumption of the western academic and humanitarian forums. Similar to the young filmmakers at the Jantar Mantar, they approach with preconceived notions of a transgender victim narrative:

> Over the years Anjum became Delhi's most famous Hijra. Film-makers fought over her. NGOs hoarded her…In interviews Anjum would be encouraged to talk about the abuse and cruelty that her interlocuters assumed she had been subjected to by her conventional Muslim parents, siblings and neighbours before she left home. They were invariably disappointed when she told them how much her mother and father had loved her… "Others have horrible stories, the kind you people like to write about," she would say. "Why not talk to them?" (Roy 2017, 30)

Anjum's response is an outright rejection of what Parikh says is "humanitarian intervention [that] depends upon eliciting the assent of "powerful people" and a "leisure class" who consume human rights narratives" (Parikh 2017, 87). Upon Anjum's gradual disillusionment with capitalist humanitarian intervention that evacuates her political subjectivity and ascribes her to nothing more than a pathetic image of vulnerability and victimhood, she resorts to an alternative subjecthood that refuses to be "saved". Furthermore, in refusing to be confined by

the conditions of the postcolonial neoliberal nation, the individuals at Jannat remain as human beings and citizen of a utopic space, and not subalterns of a larger postcolonial neoliberal nation state that penalizes them. Nationalism and national projects and their failures are central to postcolonial utopian thinking. Partha Chatterjee for instance, sees nationalism as a blow against decolonisation processes, because postcolonial nations are forced to adopt "a national form" that is hostile to their own cultures in order to fight against the western nationalism of colonial powers (Chatterjee quoted in Ashcroft 2007, 3). In the context of the novel, neoliberalism is the new economic model India appropriates to accessorise the already borrowed garb of nationalism. But this time, instead of appropriating this new model to fight the West, neoliberal practices are sanctioned as a matter of national pride, development and route to an equal footing with the West. Anjum's rejection of the PNN triad that subalternizes people like her, therefore, could be read as a decolonising utopian process at odds with national, economic, and cultural visions of mainstream India.

In an even more revolutionary gesture, Anjum also appropriates the mainstream's dehumanization of her humanity. In a final and absolute gesture of renunciation Anjum moves out of the Khwabgah and choses to live among the dead:

> She lived in the graveyard like a tree…When she first moved in, she endured months of casual cruelty like a tree would - without flinching…When people called her names – clown without a circus, queen without a palace – she let the hurt blow through her branches like a breeze and used the music of her rustling leaves as balm to ease her pain. (Roy 2017, 7)

Michel Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality,* writes of how discourses of power that were instrumental in historically undermining the homosexual community was appropriated in order to transform the derogatory rhetoric into a language of power and resistance. Consider for instance, the etymology of the terms "queer" and "negritude" (deriving from nègre, the French equivalent of negro). Foucault argues that "we must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy (Foucault 1978, 101). This opposing strategy he terms a "reverse" discourse (Foucault 1978, 101). Anjum ultimately resorts to this strategy in appropriating the dehumanizing terminology ascribed to the likes of her by the neoliberal economic framework to envision imaginative political subjecthoods that render the globalized conceptualisation of the same as delimiting and ineffective in protecting the human, leave alone their rights. She retorts, "Who says my name is Anjum[4]? I'm

not Anjum, I'm Anjuman. I'm a *mehfil*, I'm a gathering. Of everybody and nobody, of everything and nothing" (Roy 2017, 8). It is hence Anjum's sense of empathetic obligation to the Other, her ability to appropriate the dehumanizing neoliberal development discourse in liberatory forms, and her defiance to humanitarian narratives of victimhood that enables Jannat to emerge as a new political community that redefines notions of ethics, justice and morality.

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Between Memory and History: The Dynamics of Space and Place in Amitav Ghosh's The Shadow Lines

Nadia Butt

Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* demonstrates how individual and family memories mirror social and historical transformation. Not only does the novel point to the importance of histor-ical events shaping private lives, but it particularly underlines the role of displacement and relocation in shaping the imagination of ordinary individuals in the middle of a political as well as geographical change. Since the intersection of memory and history just as space and place is at the heart of the

novel, this article seeks to highlight its significance by critically examining the relationship between memory and history and space and place in the plotline.

The fragmentary narrative of *The Shadow Lines*, in which "time and space are col-lapsed" (Hawley 2005, 8), unfolds the narrator's experiences in different cultural locations and time periods. The novel was published in 1988, four years after the sectarian violence that shook New Delhi in the wake of the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's assassination. In fact, the novel is set against the backdrop of major historical events such as the Swadeshi movement, the Second World War, the Partition of India, the communal riots of 1963-64 in Dhaka and Calcutta, the Maoist Movement, the India-China War, the India-Pakistan War and the fall of Dhaka from East Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh in 1971.The story spans three gen-erations of the narrator's family, spreading over East Bengal, Calcutta and London. Opening in Calcutta in the 1960s, the novel portrays two families—one English, one Bengali— known to each other from the time of the Raj, as their lives intertwine in tragic and comic ways. The unnamed narrator as a family archivist travels between Calcutta and London in 1981 in order to explore his family history which consists of stories of his extended family. These stories reveal the emotional and political dilemmas of his grandmother Th'amma, and his grandaunt Mayadebi, of his uncles Tridib and Robi, of his cousin Ila, and of May Price, a family friend

in London. All these stories-within-stories are united by the thread of memory and imagina-tion as the novelist treats both memory and imagination as a driving force of the narrative however (un)reliable.

Within the flashback narrative framework, the narrator, Indian-born and English-educated, traces events back and forth in time, from the outbreak of the Second World War to the late twentieth century, through years of Bengali partition and the loss of innocent lives, observing the ways in which political events invade private lives. Hence, the reader learns that Tridib was born in 1932 and had been to England with his parents in 1939, where his father had received medical treatment. May Price, with whose family they shared a close relation-ship, had begun a long correspondence with Tridib in 1959. Unfortunately, Tridib lost his life in a communal riot in Dhaka in 1964 while May was on a visit to India. Examining the am-bivalence of cultural and national borders, connecting and separating individuals and families, the author addresses the fate of nations - India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh - to offer observa-tions about a profoundly complex political conflict in the postcolonial and Post-Partition sub-continent between two major ethnic communities of Hindus and Muslims.

By spreading the story over diverse geographical and national landscapes in which memory and imagination reinvent historical reality, Ghosh highlights how the 'shad-

ows' of imaginary and remembered spaces haunt all characters in the novel as they struggle with the past in an uncertain present. At the same time, these 'shadows' in the form of 'national boundaries' not only manipulate private and political spheres, but also demonstrate an in-di-vidual's lifelong effort to win over artificial borders, invading the space of home/land. In or-der to bring out the irony of dividing ancient cultures and civilisations by drawing borders and giving a new name to a piece of mutual territory, Ghosh contends the sinister smoke screens of nationalism hitherto unknown on the Indi-an subcontinent until the Partition of the subcontinent in 1947 through the all-pervasive metaphor of 'shadow lines' in the novel.

Memory and History and Space and Place : Map-ping the Terrain

Recently, the concept of cultural memory, first devel-oped by German scholars Jan Assmann (2012) and Alei-da Assmann (2013; 2010) and Astrid Erll (2011), has been discussed with reference to its transnational and transcultural dimensions (de Cesari and Rigney 2014; Crownshaw 2013; see Butt 2015). At the same time, sev-eral connections have been drawn between memory and history. The discourse of (cultural) memory seems to urge a more critical view of history. Hence, memory is often discussed as dramatically different from history. According to French philosopher Pierre Nora:

> Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name (…)History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past (…) Memory takes root in the concrete, in spac-es, gestures, images, and objects; history binds itself strictly to temporal continuities, to progressions and to relations between things. Memory is absolute, while history can only conceive the relative. (1989, 8-9)

While for Nora, "History is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to sup-press and destroy it" (1989, 9), for Ghosh memory is always sceptical of history – history that can be manipulated by politicians and historians. Ananya Jahanara Kabir takes one step fur-ther from the conflict between memory and history and introduces the notion of post-amnesia, which she defines as a way of 'remembering and forgetting' East Pakistan (2017 web), argu-ing that "For both Pakistan and Bangladesh, the time between 1947 and 1971 was best forgotten" (2017 web). Kabir claims post-amnesia as a more potent term to understand the twin phenomenon of Partition in the history of South Asia than Marianne Hirsch's term postmemory (2012), which indicates the transmission of traumatic memory, namely the memories of the Holocaust generation to the new generation.

Looking at the forgotten triangle of West Pakistan, East Pakistan as erased from the world atlas and replaced by a new nation-state Bangladesh is to engage with what Michael Rothberg has called 'multidirectional memory' (2009) – memory which recognises the inter-connectedness of traumatic events on a large scale. Although Rothberg discusses multidirectional memories that connect the Holocaust and colonialism, "his model is highly useful for thinking through the relationship between 1947 and 1971, and between successive waves of memory and forgetting these engender" (Kabir 2017 Web). Kabir makes a remarkable obser-vation in this regard, claiming: "Acknowledging the multidirectionality of cultural memory is to open the door to new ways of thinking about Partition(s) as well as seeking emotionally sustainable models for reparation and healing. East Pakistan is, in this context, an exemplary shared lost space for all three nations" (2017 web). Ghosh's novel, set at the cross-roads of memory and history, precisely does what Kabir states: it treats memory as multidirectional in order to provide new perspectives on the double Partition – 1947 and 1971 – on the Indian subcontinent.

The concept of multidirectional memory also takes me to Ghosh's innovative repre-sentation of place and space in his plotline as ideas of space and place are crucial to his treat-ment of both memory and history in his novel. Just as memory has been perceived in terms

of a location (see Samuel 1996; see Klüger 2003), a significant number of critics have conceptu-alised cultural processes in geographical and metaphorical terms such as Mary Louise Pratt, Elleke Boehmer, Peter Hulme or Stephen Greenblatt; in particular, Homi Bhabha and Edward Soja theorise these processes through the notion of Third Space. Space, as many critics have argued, does not merely provide a background for cultural configurations; rather, it is an es-sential part of cultural and political transformations. In Ghosh's fictional realms, however, local and global, seen and unseen space is perceived and imagined in the narrator's ritual of memory as a fundamental facet of individual, national, familial, and communal metamorpho-ses. Consequently, space is not merely remembered as an imaginative construct, but it is rep-resented as a domain of political and cultural encounters, which actually shapes the connec-tion of different characters with territory and location. Hence, space is represented as a dy-namic arrangement between people, places, cultures and societies as James Clifford points out, "space is never ontologically given. It is discursively mapped and corporeally practiced" (1997, 54). According to Clifford, space is composed through movement, produced through use, and is simultaneously an agent and a result of action or practice. Therefore, it is essential to make a distinction between 'space' and 'place.'

The difference and connection between space and place have been examined by a number of cultural and post-

colonial critics. According to Bill Ashcroft, for example, 'space' is the creation of colonialism, which virtually dislocated the colonised; 'place' in contrast is the pre-colonial perception of belonging in time, community and landscape – a perception that postcolonial transformation strives to retrieve, if in the "delocalised," that is, "spatialised" form of global consciousness (2000, 15). Finally, just as memory and history differ from each other, so are place and space which the following close reading of the novel aims to demon-strate.

Postcolonial Cartographies: Tridib's Art of Imagining Spaces as Opposed to Ila

The major characters in the novel uniquely showcase the relationship between memory and history just as space and place. Particularly, they tend to experience space and place as a free entity beyond the artificial markers that may curb freedom of movement. While going down memory lane, the narrator seems to try inhabiting a space, like Tridib does, to achieve freedom and liberty in its entirety since freedom is central to every character's story in the novel. However, national uprising as a legacy of the Partition of the subcontinent in 1947 pushes the characters from the old as well as new generation, as demonstrated by Tridib's killing in an act of ethnic violence, to the brink of tragedy – a tragedy that makes the narrator question the validity of national and geographical borders. Rituparna Roy, therefore, reminds us, "Ghosh's is an essentially idealistic vision of a world

without borders – the emblems of which in *The Shadow Lines* happen to be the atlas and the story of Tristan, which are what Tridib bequeaths to his nephew" (2010, 113).

Since the narrator contests artificial divisions of the subcontinent as well as postcolo-nial cartographies, the novel presents space through the vivid imagination of the narrator and his most influential relative Tridib. This space is addressed not only as a space of human and cultural encounters, but of overlapping histories and territories, shifting countries and conti-nents where different people, cultures, nations and communities seek to communicate above the 'shadow lines' of social, national and territorial barriers. Hence, the idea of space as a dy-namic cultural site in the novel brings out the role of national ideologies in shaping personal memory and collective history. In fact, a profound preoccupation with spaces in the novel also points to the cartographic imagination of the Bengali community. According to Meenakshi Mukherjee, cartographic imagination is peculiar to Bengali imagination: "Whether as a result of a relatively early exposure to colonial education or as a reaction to it, real journeys within the country and imagined travels to faraway places outside national boundaries have always fascinated the Bengali middle class" (2000, 137). Thus, a deep fascination with distant space and place characterises the narrator's as well as his family's imagination in both parts of the novel. Indeed, spatial practices work

on a variety of levels in the novel such as telling stories and events, evoking the role of imaginary and real places across distant cultures and commu-nities, watching fading photographs, reading maps and old newspapers, reminiscing about forgotten episodes of mutual bonding, and playing childhood games.

The narrator claims that he has learned the practice of imagining space and place from his alter-ego Tridib. While remembering him, the narrator reveals that it is Tridib who has given him "worlds to travel" and "eyes to see them with" (Ghosh 2005, 20). It is Tridib that triggers in him a longing to imagine familiar and unfamiliar places in memory and imagination. In short, it is Tridib's gift of imagination that kindles in the narrator a desire to travel around the globe. Both have a penchant to study maps to develop and discover their distinct sense of travelling to places without any kind of mental and physical border or barrier. Tridib has even suggested to the narrator to use his "imagination with precision" (Ghosh 2005,24) in order to voyage into unknown spaces. He once said to the narrator that one could never know anything except through desire "that carried one beyond the limits of one's mind to other times and other places, and even, if one was lucky, to a place where there was no border be-tween oneself and one's image in the mirror" (Ghosh 2005,29). The narrator is sad to know that his globetrotter cousin Ila, nevertheless, has no concept of place because she cannot in-vent a place

for herself but relies on the inventions of others:

> I could not persuade her that a place does not merely exist, that it has to be invented in one's imagination; that her practical, bustling London was no less invented than mine, neither more nor less true, only very far apart. It was not her fault that she could not understand, for as Tridib often said of her, the inventions she lived in moved with her, so that although she had lived in many places, she had never travelled at all. (Ghosh 2005,21)

Instead of ever making efforts to understand him, Ila despises the narrator for having a dreamy view of distant places; for she could never believe in space as a human construction but looks upon it as a given reality. She dismisses the narrator's practice of imaginary space construction as a mere indulgence in fancy:

It's you who were peculiar, sitting in that poky little flat in Calcutta, dreaming about faraway places. I probably did you no end of good; at least you learnt that those cities you saw on maps were real places, not like those fairylands Tridib made up for you. (Ghosh 2005,23-24)
The narrator realises that lla is somewhat trapped in a static zone for having a rigid view of space and place, even though she has travelled to different regions of the world. The other problem is that Ila perceives the present without ever seeking its affinity with the past, espe-cially when memory is not crucial to her concep-

tion of space and place. She is unable to see the past through memory or imagination whereas once the narrator has seen the past through Tridib's eyes, the past "seemed concurrent with its present" (Ghosh 2005,31). The narrator points out:

> Ila lived so intensely in the present that she would not have believed that there really were people like Tridib, who could experience the world as concretely in their imagi-nation as she did through her senses, more so if anything, since to them these experi-ences were permanently available in their memories. (Ghosh 2005,29-30)

Although Ila wants to enjoy a sense of bonding with the narrator, she tends to look down upon him at the same time for inhabiting middleclass suburbs of Delhi and Calcutta where no events of global importance ever take place, "nothing that sets a political example to the world, nothing that's really remembered" (Ghosh 2005,102). The narrator is confused because he has always viewed the world as a mosaic of interconnected places. Calcutta for him is as much a part of London as London is a part of Calcutta, especially when all places are border-less space in the process of memory like hues of the same picture. Moreover, he is surprised to know that Ila has no understanding of events outside the colonial motherland England:

> I began to marvel at the easy arrogance with which

> she believed that her experience could encompass other moments simply because it had come later; that times and places are the same because they happen to look alike, like airport lounges. (Ghosh 2005,101)

He confesses that many events of global importance might have taken place only in England, but this does not mean that the history of his country should be sniggered at. He recollects how his homeland has undergone untellable political calamities while confessing his per-cep-tion of England only as a homeland of imagination, maintaining, "I knew nothing at all about England except an invention. But still I had known people of my own age who had survived the Great Terror in the Calcutta of the sixties and seventies" (Ghosh 2005,103). Since he ap-prehends space as a cultural artifact (see Shields 197), he cannot, like Ila, imagine place as a closed container, independent of human subjectivity and agency. Furthermore, he simply thinks above Ila's most ardent desire to belong in the prosperous West , especially in the way she participates in the rallies and demonstrations. Indeed, both Ila and Th'amma want to be-long and hold on to identity as watertight compartments whereas the narrator as Tridib's protege seeks identity as fluid and moving. The narrator underlines the significance of memory and imagination throughout the novel in inventing place because he wants to be free of other people's fabrication of space and place. In other words, he strives to read space above all kinds of artificial borders to imagine its

true dimensions himself. As a school boy, the narrator conjures up a picture of London that is so vivid in his imagination that he could recognize places by their mere mention of name when he visits London years later and learns that real places can be invented inside your head: the Tridib who had pushed me to imagine the roofs of Colombo for myself, the Tridib who had said that we could not see without inventing what we saw, so at least we could try to do it properly . . . because . . . if we didn't try ourselves, we would never be free of other people's inventions. (Ghosh 200531)

The narrator is also deeply mesmerised by an imaginary space like Tridib's ruin which he dis-covers at the Victoria Memorial in Calcutta. In 1959 when Tridib was twenty-seven and May Price nineteen, they had begun a long correspondence, but they met for the first time in that ruin in Calcutta in 1964. Tridib had expressed in his last letter to May that he wanted them to "meet far away from friends and relatives—in a place without a past, without history, free, really free, two people coming together with the utter freedom of strangers" (Ghosh 2005,141). In fact, Tridib epitomises the narrator's as well as every other character's desire to overcome the shadow lines of borders and distance to inhabit a space of cultural and human contact, shadows which tend to weaken the character's aspirations for freedom.

The narrator as a historian and Tridib as an archaeol-

ogist seem to complement each other in the novel as a narrative of memory. The cosmopolitan Tridib as a world citizen in the real sense of the word is a modern nomad who transcends with ease different geographical spaces; hence, he is a "translated" man (Rushdie 1991, 17) whose imagination can transcend borders and barriers, endowing him with a sense of freedom whenever he is face to face with cultural and national differences in distant locations. The narrator declares that even years after his death, Tridib seems to be watching over him as he tries "to learn the meaning of dis-tance. His atlas showed me, for example, that within the tidy ordering of Euclidean space, Chiang Mai in Thailand was much nearer Calcutta than Delhi" (Ghosh 2005,227). Thus, time and distance like space and place appear to be a mystery that the narrator has to reckon with to relive and repossess his fast fading past.

'The Past is Not a Foreign Country': Memory and Forgetting

Priya Kumar considers *The Shadow Lines* to be a testimony of loss and memory since the text compels the reader to concede "the past-in-presentness of partition as a history that is not done with, that refuses to be past" (1999, 201). Since the past permeates the present, the nar-rator is deeply preoccupied with it to understand not only his family history but the history of his country. In the opening of his essay "Separating Anxiety: Growing

up Inter/National in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*" (1994), Suvir Kaul, therefore, points out that the question if you remember is the most insistent in the novel that brings together the private and the public. Kaul declares that this question "shapes the narrator's search for connection, for re-covery of lost information, repressed experiences, for the details of trauma and joy that have receded into the archive of private and public memory (1994, 125). While remembering his grandmother's journey to Dhaka and Tridib's untimely death afterwards, the narrator recol-lects a series of political incidents in Calcutta and Dhaka simultaneously to bring out the enormity of the central tragedy in his narration. It started with the disappearance of Mu-i-Mubarak, the hair of the Prophet Mohammed, from Hazratbal Mosque in Kashmir in 1963 and its recovery in 1964. In one of the riots in Khulna, a small town in the distant east of Pakistan, a demonstration turned violent on the 4th of January 1964. This demonstration is "branded in [the narrator's] memory" (Ghosh 2005,222) because it is in this demonstration that Tridib lost his life. While recollecting an individual's sacrifice and his community's struggle with senseless political and national barriers, the narrator states:

> Every word I write about those events of 1964 is the product of a struggle with si-lence. It is a struggle I am destined to lose—have already lost—for even after all these years I do not know where within me,

> in which corner of my world, this silence lies. All I know of it is what it is not. It is not, for example, the silence of an imperfect memory. Nor is it a silence enforced by a ruthless state—nothing like that: no barbed wire, no check-points to tell me where its boundaries lie. (Ghosh 2005, 213)

The narrator has a twin motive in narrating from the sources of memory: first, to communicate the lurking political turmoil beneath the tender veneer of his childhood years in Post-Partition India; and secondly, to save his memories from slipping into the realm of forgetting. The struggle with silence is not only a struggle with recollection, but also a struggle with the fading past in the fast-changing present. It is, therefore, justified to say that Ghosh's novel is a fine illustration of post-amnesia (Kabir 2017 web) as the narrator is anxious to hold on to the past and to document its significance. In 1979 the narrator recollects the events of 1964 in-volving his friend because he is determined not to let "the past vanish without trace; I was determined to persuade them of its importance" (Ghosh 2005, 271). The narrator uses memory not merely to comprehend the individual and collective cultural past that has been confound-ing him for fifteen long years, but also to figure out 'what' and 'how' to remember. Perhaps this is the reason that the narrative reflects a constant process of introspection; as Louis James proclaims, "if *Circle of Reason* is about knowledge, *The Shadow Line*s is about knowing" (1999, 56).

Ghosh's transnational vision of the Indian subcontinent is conspicuous in his represen-tations of national borders as he seems to believe in cosmopolitan identity as much as being a global citizen like his narrator. The novel as a work of commemoration and reminiscence is an attempt not only to evoke the memory of the ethnic riots of 1964 and to mourn the death of innocent people, but also to pay a tribute to those who dream of the subcontinent without bor-ders. The narrator recollects,

> ...[b]y the end of January 1964 the riots had faded away from the pages of the newspa-pers, disappeared from the collective imagination of "responsible opinion," vanished without leaving a trace in the histories and bookshelves. They had dropped out of memory into the crater of a volcano of silence. (Ghosh 2005, 226)

The narrator is surprised to find out in his study of old newspapers that the riots in Khulna and Calcutta have not ever made the newspaper headlines, but became a mere bottom page story. At this stage the narrator has started the "strangest journey: a voyage into a land outside space, an expanse without distances; a land of looking-glass events" (Ghosh 2005, 219). He is deeply disturbed to know that the newspapers of 1964 in India have not given enough empha-sis to communal violence in Dhaka and consequent riots in Calcutta. A sudden realisation that the distance of twelve hundred miles

between Srinagar (Kashmir) and Calcutta, and Dhaka being in another country, could be used as a reason to keep people in Calcutta in the dark. This piece of news leads the narrator to discover a momentous truth, that is, national frontiers create a false sense of distance and reality. In other words, national borders generate the illu-sion of differences. It is this illusion of difference he seeks to address in remembering his family in relation to the English, Indian and Bengali political histories.

The narrator also meticulously recollects trouble in Dhaka and Calcutta simultaneously as political tensions in these two cities coincide with each other. When Muslims are rumoured to have poisoned the water of Calcutta in 1964 as a protest against the communal crisis in Dhaka, the narrator felt at that time that "our city had turned against us" (Ghosh 2005,199). Out of terror of riots, he could not even trust his Muslim friend Montu. He remembers fear suddenly filling the familiar space of his native city:

> It is a fear that comes of the knowledge that normalcy is utterly contingent, that the spaces that surround one, the streets that one inhabits, can become, suddenly and without warning, as hostile as a desert in a flash flood. It is this that sets apart the thousand million people who inhabit the subcontinent from the rest of the world—not language, not food, not music—it is the special quality of loneliness that grows out of the fear of the war between oneself and one's

> image in the mirror. (Ghosh 2005,200)

However, the irony is that Indians are ultimately compelled to shed borders and barriers be-cause abstract concepts of nationalism can never replace human bonding. The grandmother's orthodox Hindu uncle Jethamoshai, for example, has never let the shadow of any Muslim ever pass him all his life, but after the partition when he has almost lost his senses, he is happily looked after by a Muslim family. Jethamoshai claims that his fate is tied to his land whether his land is transferred to his enemies or not:

> Once you start moving you never stop. That's what I told my sons when they took the trains. I said: I don't believe in this India-Shindia. It's very well, you're going away now, but suppose when you get there they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? Where will you move to? No one will have you anywhere. As for me, I was born here, and I'll die here. (Ghosh 2005, 211)

By pondering over the sites of memory as sites of mourning, the novel depicts how national-ism invades private lives to such an extent that it breaks down families completely as some members are compelled to leave to feel secure whereas some are not ready to give in to the new political order. The narrator at the same time thinks about the tragic outcomes of cultural and national differences that do damage beyond repair as noticeable in

the case of Jetham-oshai who is in reality a non- political figure. But he is targeted as an enemy as he is imagined to be inhabiting a space and place, which is supposed to be no longer his own. While com-menting on Ghosh's logic of drafting the poetics and politics of space in the novel, Mukherjee makes a pertinent comment:

> Amitav Ghosh would like to believe in a world where there is nothing in between, where borders are il-lusions. Actually, three countries get interlocked in Amitav Ghosh's *Shadow Lines*—East Pakistan before it became Bangladesh, England, and In-dia—and people of at least three religions and nationalities impinge upon one anoth-er's lives and deaths. It is very much a text of our times when human lives spill over from one country to another, where language and loyalties cannot be contained within tidy national frontiers. (2008,181)

Due to a long silence within and without with respect to the individual and communal crisis of 1964, it takes the narrator "fifteen years to discover" that there was a connection between "my nightmare bus ride back from school and the events that befell Tridib and others in Dhaka" (Ghosh 2005,214; emphasis in original). The narrator wonders at his stupidity for finding the truth only after such a long time:

> I believed in the reality of space; I believed that dis-tance separates, that it is a corpore-al substance; I

> believed in the reality of nations and borders; I believed that across the border there existed another reality (. . .) I could not have perceived that there was something more than an incidental connection between those events of which I had a brief glimpse from the windows of that bus, in Calcutta, and those other events in Dhaka, simply because Dhaka was in another country. (Ghosh 2005,214)

Despite condemning the masses' obsession with the shadow lines of hatred and hostility out of national sentiments, the narrator shows how some are capable of going beyond the narrow and rigid confines of identity politics. Additionally, the narrator also highlights how ordinary people try their best to seek mutual sympathy among various ethnic groups of the subconti-nent and how sympathy does not enter official records, leading to a conflict between personal and public memory. As in the wake of Partition and later on during the trouble in Dhaka in 1964, there were innumerable cases of Muslims in East Pakistan giving shelter to Hindus and Hindus sheltering Muslims. "But they were ordinary people, soon forgotten—not for them any Martyr's Memorials or Eternal Flames" (Ghosh 2005,225). However, he feels compelled to consider that some people like his grandmother believe in not only drawing lines as a part of their faith but respecting them with blood. The narrator eventually arrives at the conclusion that "there was a special enchantment in lines" (Ghosh 2005,228) as the pattern of the world. Therefore, ordinary people

are enchanted with borders, with 'imagined communities' (see Anderson 1983, 15) no matter how much of 'an invented tradition' (see Hobsbawm and Ranger 2000, 1-14) these borders and imagined communities are. The narrator concludes:

> They had drawn their borders, believing in that pattern, in the enchantment of lines, hoping perhaps that once they had etched their borders upon the map, the two bits of land would sail away from each other like the shifting tectonic plates of the prehistoric Gondwanaland. What had they felt, I wondered, when they discovered that they had created not a separation, but a yet-undiscovered irony— the irony that killed Tridib. (Ghosh 2005,228)

Tridib's death as a looming tragedy in the riots of 1964 is central to trigger the memory of the narrator in composing a family memoir. While underlining his profound association with Tridib as an embodiment of freedom, the narrator sheds light on space and place as subject to divisions and differences where there should be no border or barrier. The narrator hence seeks to demonstrate the irony of his relative's sacrifice. He highlights that Tridib as a staunch be-liever of inventing and producing a space beyond borders gives his life away to save human lives, but the borders stay where they are. His death saves May but not his aunt's uncle Jeth-amoshai for whom he has actually travelled from Calcutta to Dhaka. Because Jethamoshai is a Bengali Hindu and not a Bengali Mus-

lim, he falls prey to fanatic Muslim Bengali nationalists despite Tridib's attempts at rescuing him. Indeed, the narrator is left wondering why borders and not human ideals win in the end.

Remembering Tha'mma's Deluding Dimensions of Space and Place

Several memory novels like Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's *The Shards of Memory* (1995) or Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) narrate the family saga that focuses on the am-bivalent relationships between parents and children or aunts and nephews and nieces in the historical context. However, recently there seems to be a trend of dealing with the relationship of grandparents and grandchildren in a memory narrative. If Vikram Seth chooses to write a true memoir about his great-grand uncle and great-grand aunt in his true biography *Two Lives* (2005), Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* as a fictional memoir underlines the relationship between grandmother and grandson. The character of the grandmother is central to the presentation of space and place with reference to nation and nationalism in the novel as the narrator goes down memory lane. Whereas Tridib represents the modern version of nationalism that calls for a borderless world, Tha'mma stands for the radical "brand of nationalism, current during the first half of the twentieth-century" (Roy 2010, 119) for which she is ready to make every kind of sacrifice.

The titles of two separate parts in the novel, 'Going Away' and 'Coming Home' point to the dilemma of space and place for the people of contemporary India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh with reference to the narrator's grandmother, dearly called Tha'mma, who was born in Dhaka and migrated to Mandalay because of her husband's profession but relocated to Cal-cutta after his death. When Tha'mma tries to explain that in the past coming and going from Dhaka had never been a problem and that no one ever stopped her, the narrator as a school boy jumps at the ungrammatical expression of his grandmother and wonders why she could not make a difference between coming and going: "Tha'mma, Tha'mma! I cried. How could you have 'come' home to Dhaka? You don't know the difference between coming and go-ing!" (Ghosh 2005,150). At this juncture, the narrator tries to share with the reader a deep-rooted confusion and chaos in the psyche of partition victims that face an era of barbed wires and checkpoints on their old territory. The narrator infers:

> Every language assumes a centrality, a fixed and settled point to go away from and come back to, and what my grandmother was looking for was a journey which was not a coming and a going at all; a journey that was a search for precisely that fixed point which permits the proper use of verbs of movement. (Ghosh 2005,150)

The narrator is, at the same time, particularly concerned with the predicament of dogmatic Indian nationalists who are obsessed with drawing lines and shutting doors on each other when in history they were all one people. 'Going away' and 'Coming home' in the past was something one could achieve without risking one's life in the subcontinent; for Dhaka or Cal-cutta were places to enter without showing any passports or identity card. Ghosh states:

> ...the simple fact that there had never been a moment in the four-thousand-year-old his-tory of that map, where the places we know as Dhaka and Calcutta were more closely bound to each other than after they had drawn their lines—so closely that I, in Cal-cut-ta, had only to look into the mirror to be in Dha-ka; a moment when each city was the invented image of the other, locked into an irreversible symmetry by the line that was to set us free—our looking-glass border. (Ghosh 2005,228)

The narrative undercuts imagined differences between the newly created nation states on the subcontinent by emphasising similarities between Dhaka and Calcut-ta through the recurrent leitmotif of the mirror. The reader is made to think that the "looking-glass border" (Ghosh 2005,228) attempts to create a mirage of other-ness but only sees itself reflected. Experiment-ing with a compass on Tridib's old atlas, the narrator makes some

startling discoveries. He notices that even though he "believed in the power of distance" (Ghosh 2005,222) he could not help ignoring that Calcutta and Khulna, despite national barriers being created between the two cities, "face each other at a watchful equidistance across the border" (Ghosh 2005,226). Consequently, he is convinced that border, however tangible, is a shadow of the mind; it is as fictive as it is real since human imagination can never perceive it as a fixed his-torical fact.

Just as Tridib and Ila have their own practices of inhabiting social and political space so has the narrator's grandmother Tha'mma. Having a primordial view of nationalism, the grandmother equates native space with freedom and honour. According to Tha'mma who has a nationalist mindset, Ila has no right to stay in England because she is not a 'national' there even when the questions of national identity have undergone a radical change in an era of transnationalism. She questions furiously, "What's she doing in that country?" (Ghosh 2005,76) and reasons out:

> She doesn't belong there. It took those people a long time to build that country; hundreds of years, years and years of war and bloodshed . . .War is their religion. That's what it takes to make a country. Once that happens people forget they were born this or that, Muslim or Hindu, Bengali or Punjabi: they become a family born of the same pool of blood. That is what you have to achieve for India, don't you see? (Ghosh 2005, 76)

After her retirement in 1962 as a headmistress from a public school where she has worked for twenty-seven years, the grandmother begins to feel nostalgic about her house in Dhaka. She has reached a stage in her life where she cannot suppress old memories of her ancestral home any longer. She sadly recollects how her ancestral house was divided with a wall between two brothers, her father and her uncle Jethamoshai. The reader thus first encounters the partition of domestic space, a partition that is repeated on the national space with the partition of the subcontinent in 1947. The grandmother reminisces:

> They had all longed for the house to be divided when the quarrels were at their worst, but once it had actually happened and each family had moved into their own part of it, instead of the peace they had so much looked forward to, they found that a strange, eerie silence had descended on the house. (Ghosh 2005,121)

Because the grandmother is convinced of the reality of borders, she asks her son before flying to Dhaka if she would be able "to see the border between India and East Pakistan from the plane" (Ghosh 2005,148). When her son laughs at her question and taunts her if she thought that "the border was a long black line with green on one side and scarlet on the other, like it was on the school atlas," (Ghosh 2005,148) she retorts: "But surely there's something—trenches perhaps, or soldiers, or guns pointing at each other, or even just barren strips of land. Don't they call it no-man's land?" (Ghosh 2005,148).

She ends up questioning some of the fundamentals of her definition of nationalism:

> But if there aren't any trenches or anything, how are people to know? I mean, where's the difference then? And if there's no difference, both sides will be the same; it'll be just like it used to be before, when we used to catch a train in Dhaka and get off in Calcutta the next day without anybody stopping us. What was it for all then—the par-tition and the killing and everything—if there isn't something in between? (Ghosh 2005,148-149)

By highlighting the fact that even after the partition there might not be any difference between the two regions across the border, the novel questions the ideology of nationalism through temporal and spatial images. One of the paramount characteristics of the ideology of nationalism is that it defines itself in opposition to other countries across the border (see Renan 1990, 8-22; see Gellner 1994, 63-70; see Hutchinson 1987). Ghosh deplores the division of the subcontinent by challenging and contesting the "myth of nationalism" (e.g. see Sethi 1999) on the Indian subcontinent, which has erected walls among heterogeneous ethnicities in the false garb of freedom and liberty. When Tridib's brother Robi recollects Tridib's death in Dhaka in a Bangladeshi restaurant in England, fifteen years later, he expresses bitterly the cynicism towards the new nation states, which is seminal to Ghosh's view of the present-day subcontinent:

> And then I think to myself, why don't they draw thousands of little lines through the whole subcontinent and give every little place a new name? What would it change? It's a mirage; the whole thing is a mirage. How can anyone divide memory? If freedom was possible, surely Tridib's death would have set me free. (Ghosh 2005, 241)

By recollecting the events of 1964 and their role in shaping private and public spaces, Ghosh gives a new perspective on personal and historical memory. Even the development of story "becomes a commentary on the ways in which histories get constructed" (Singh 2005, 163). This broader notion of history is a recurring theme in Ghosh's writing, as noted by Brinda Bose: "Ghosh's fiction takes upon itself the responsibility of re-assessing its troubled ante-cedents, using history as a tool by which we can begin to make sense of—or at least come to terms with—our troubling present" (2001, 235). As the story develops, the strands of memory, history, space and place are woven into each other in a fine tapestry in a family chronicle about individuals between different cultural and national belongings. Bose adds:

In Ghosh's fiction, the diasporic entity continuously negotiates between two lands, separated by both time and space—history and geography—and attempts to redefine the present through a nuanced understanding of the past. As the narrator in *The Shadow Lines* embarks upon a journey of discovery of roots and reasons, the more

of the one he unearths leaves him with loss of the other. He is forced to conclude that know-ing the causes and effects of that history which he had not fully apprehended as a child was not an end in itself. The metajourney that this novel undertakes follows the narrator—as he weaves and winds his way through a succession of once-imaginary homelands—into that third space where boundaries are blurred and cultures collide, creating at once a disabling confusion and an enabling complexity. No story—or history, for that matter—can be acceptable as the ultimate truth, since truths vary according to perspectives and locations. (2001, 239)

By introducing the idea of 'third space,' Bose draws our attention to the core of Ghosh's per-ception of space and place above all kinds of boundaries in relation to history and memory. Ghosh's narrator narrates various versions of nation and nationalism by tracking their effects on his family members, hence highlighting ordinary people's confrontations with spatial hur-dles. The narrator's family history and their connections with people of 'other' cultures and ethnicities confirm that cultures communicate in the 'third space' no matter how intensely the communalists strive to undermine such connections and communications. Consequently, the narrator reconciles with Tridib's death as a sacrifice as well as an irony

Conclusion

The Shadow Lines is not solely a novel about dreamers like Tridib or displaced individuals like Tha'mma, but more importantly about the plight of the Bengali diaspora (see e.g. Chakravarti 1996). However, the novel presents the Bengali diaspora on a wider scale by spreading the story over different countries and continents. By tracing a contrast between personal memory and political history and between the space of cultural interactions and the place of barbed wires, Ghosh's narrator offers different ways of reading larger political design of the fate of three nations—India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Finally, the narrator's movement back and forth in time and space is not merely a structural device; it is a means of reminding the reader that the partition perpetuates in the current political spheres of the divided subcontinent with Kashmir as a disputed territory. Hence, by remembering a family tragedy, the author makes the impact of past political events current and shakes the readers out of their apathy, so that they are able to think beyond the shadow lines and believe in shared spaces and places.

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Review of Nirmala Menon's, *Remapping the Postcolonial Canon: Remap, Reimagine and Retranslate*, Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017, pp 201, ISBN: 978-1-137-53797-3. 72,79 €

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Postcolonial theory rejects universalizing categories of European Enlightenment treating it as a repository of abstractions which can be brought and applied to different contexts. This book argues that in the productive theorizing process, it is in the danger of replicating a monolithic dominant narrow paradigm. It demonstrates a process of canonization that has created a rather small group of writers and works to represent the postcolo-

nial literary space. Much of the scholarship has treated Anglophone literature as constitutive of postcolonial literature in the geographical region of the Indian subcontinent; certain texts have acquired the status of primary/standard texts. The book addresses such historical and theoretical exclusivism in the discourse of postcolonial literature and emphasizes the need for the field to evolve into a genuinely diverse and pluralistic one. Professor Menon argues that by exploring the vastly under-researched body of regional and vernacular literatures, this domain will enrich itself; breadth will add depth to the discipline. New theory can only emerge by resetting the essentials of postcolonial thought by thinking across traditions, texts and literatures.

The book argues for a canon which is self-reflexive with a pragmatic outlook, by resisting any attempt to see its universal validity. It interrogates the fixed definitions of a singular canon and re-negotiates the dominant designs of tradition through intimations of innate heterogeneous visions. It forcefully argues that the concepts of subalternity and hybridity remain frozen as truisms in a specific historical time and context and there is a compelling need to re-interpret and re-radicalize them in various contexts. Delineating Indian context, the book articulates the need for including native, vernacular, or indigenous literatures/conceptions to make sense of complex ground realities in more comprehensive ways. It is only logical that sensitivity to cultural differences

- the hallmark of comparative perspective - should be expanded to encompass awareness of differences. This can be read as an attempt to identify concrete human history and experience as integral to understand culture, beyond the theoretical abstractions. In that sense, the book indulges in a political act of reclaiming the rationality or experience-near conceptions to enlarge the horizon of engagement —comparative, local, global and cross-cultural.

This research work is primarily concerned with an unconscious canonization that leads to certain exclusivism with regard to the literary works in English, even the translated ones. At a fundamental level, it argues against the prejudices that prevail in the name of universals like the one by Samuel P. Huntington when he says that 'Mexican-Americans can share the American dream only if they dream in English' (p.256). Authentic representation and accurate translation of the voice of the subaltern is one of the recurring themes of the book. It re-examines two major postcolonial concepts, subalternity and hybridity by using a comparative analysis of texts written in English and texts from different Indian languages.

Chapter I engages with the major debates within the field and introduces the reader to the theoretical possibility that remains hidden in the regional literatures. It elaborates the need for revisiting the existing postcolonial

canon and establishes how the existing discourse is an incomplete and curtailed representation of complex and varied literatures of India, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. It highlights the previously unexplored literary texts to question the stereotypes of hegemonic representations and to retrieve the subaltern's autonomous consciousness. Though the author focuses on literary texts from three Indian languages, the logic is laid out for explorations in any postcolonial language including Tagalog, Maori or Swahili by interested scholars. In a sense, the work performs a moral function; it seeks to include the alternative conceptualizations of subjectivity and resistance available in a wide range of historical, theoretical and political contexts with a demand of democratic accommodation, adding to the completeness of postcolonial thought. This move can also be seen to go beyond the so-called high culture to encompass aesthetic and intellectual perspectives that are supposed to lie outside the dominant classes particularly when it talks of narrative strategies regarding oral literatures that are common among postcolonial literary works.

Chapter II seeks to expand the critical vocabulary of subaltern representation. It deals with the problem whether subaltern can speak or not by comparing texts from two different regional languages of India that offer different subaltern representations with that of Arundathi Roy's *The God of Small Things*. Arundathi Roy's Velutha (*The God of Small Things)* is powerless and cannot

speak (and the need to be spoken for) whereas Mahaswetha Devi's Mary Oraon (*The Hunt*) and O.V. Vijayan's Appukilli (*The Legends of Khasak*) are intelligent and can tell their own stories. They are active subjective (and subversive) agencies of change and are complex negotiators of their positions. The chapter takes up a detailed analysis of these characters and their distinct responses to power. Clearly, the subalterns from the non-English narratives have found their voices and assert their own visions, pointing out gaps in representation in the existing canon. The need for subaltern discourses to theorize the complexities that exist in these diverse multilingual narratives is emphasized.

Chapter III on hybridity offers a fascinating counterpoint to the notion that one comes across in the works of postcolonialism's widely recognized texts like Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. Unlike the old, tired concept of hybridity that is in circulation in the 'third space', this chapter focuses on expansive view of hybridity that exists in post-colonial states and its multifarious manifestations. It brings forth new theoretical dimensions of 'interrogative' versus 'accommodative' hybridity wherein accommodative hybridity has all the elements of hybridity but is not radical enough to subvert the linear narrative as instantiated in *The Inheritance of Loss*. On the other hand, Lalithaambika Antherjanam *Cast Me Out If You Will* and Girish Karnad's *Yayati* employ hybridities in interesting and different ways. Lalithaambika's rooted and localized hybridity and Karnad's embodied hybrid-

ity conducts the discourse through a lens of rights and equality that is disruptive and interrogative in their narrative outcomes. These constructs challenge monolithic and decontextualized apolitical aspect of hybridity. The point here is that the postcolonial literary theory should move beyond the narrow confines of diaspora, migrancy and transnational level to accommodate radical notions of hybridity that challenge the status quo. The chapter also looks at the discourse of essentialism through language debate (English versus regional languages) in India via Girish Karnad's play *A Heap of Broken Images*. The play adopts a nuanced approach with regard to notions like authenticity, linguistic pride, nativism and transnationalism highlighting the point that real issues lie beyond the polemics of language debate.

Chapter IV on translation traces the history of post-colonial translations and translation theories and examines them critically. It reconceptualises the issue of postcolonial translations which makes interventionist or counter-reading possible without getting integrated into the literary or theoretical or textual meta-narratives. It problematizes the practice of translation in three types of translations: Cultural translations, Academic translations and Faithful translations. Cultural translations translate a distant culture and history whereas Academic translations do not reflect theory. A work gets absorbed into the theory by being produced for it, more as a product of theory than the source for it. Though Faithful translations maintain equality between the languages, there

is a need to engage with the theoretical aspects from a postcolonial stance. After examining two translations, Mahaswetha Devi's *Imaginary Map*s and *Mother of 1084* translated by Gayatri Spivak and Samik Bandhopadhyay respectively, the chapter develops a new translation model, Dhvani-Bhava-Rasa theory of Sanskrit poetics which allows for multiple interpretations while being conscious about the equality of exchange between the languages even between the so-called metalanguage/s and the minor languages. It values pauses and telling silences, giving space to nuance, subversion, non- integration and even contradiction. Dhvani-Bhava-Rasa theory tries to maintain the openness of language that has the scope to address the unique challenges of postcolonial translations.

Chapter V summarizes the key conclusions of the work. Based on the new proposed model of translation, the author translates a Hindi short story *Wang-Shu* by Brisham Sahni which is an appendix to the book.

It can be seen, the nodes of silence acquires distinctive new meanings through its presence and absence or disappearance, across the chapters. With regard to the silence of subaltern and hybrid experience, it is counter-revolutionary whereas with regard to the process of translation, its multivalent presence can lead to nuanced understanding. Regarding the point that whether subaltern writing is an alternative or parallel writing to the mainstream, or counter-writing with its own force to re-

sist what is exerted on the dominated, this work seems to be taking the latter position though it does not admit so.

While it is laudable, as pointed out in this project, to include non-western languages and literatures to expand the theoretical vocabulary of postcolonial canon, it is also important to be wary of India specific dynamics where premodern co-exists along with the modern as argued by some social theorists . There is a need to come up with different narrative strategies to address this premodern domain which is otherwise elusive with regard to the existing modern/ postcolonial canon. To continue the conversation concerning different rules of engagement between the subaltern and non-subaltern as discussed in this text, one may look at the motivated dialogue between Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai and the theory developed thereafter to further explore the ontological relations between experience and reason. The point here is inspite of being the 'owners', subalterns are not the 'authors' of experience and the challenge is to bring together epistemology and experience without any distortion.

All in all, this book expands the ideological and geographical scope of understanding the world beyond the entrenched canon; it is a timely addition for the transformative possibilities it holds out to direct the progress of postcolonial literary theory.

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