POSTCOLONIAL INTERVENTIONS

OPEN ISSUE

Vol. VII Issue 2

ISSN 2455 6564

JUNE 2022

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An Interdisciplinary Journal of Postcolonial Studies

ISSN 2455 6564 . Volume VII, Issue 2 . June, 2022

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Cover image: 'Massacred - Isreal Kills Scores of Palestinians'. Photograph by Alisdair Hickson. Accessed from Wikimedia Commons
Cover design: Souraj Dutta and Abin Chakraborty

Published Online June, 2022

Contents

EDITORS' NOTE

As I write, one of the oldest democracies in the world has decided to take away from women their control over their own bodies. As I write, one of the biggest democracies in the world is busy incarcerating lawyers and journalists even as it promises to the world that it will protect and preserve freedom of speech. As I write, one of the oldest democracies in the world remains more committed to guns and less to the ideas of perace and safety. As I write, one of the boggest democracies in the world is spiralling into a seemingly bottomless vortex of hate from which there appears no escape. In a tragic parody of history, the same patriarchal denigration of women which colonies were once accused of, is now being foisted on the supposed "land of the free and the home of the brave", while the draconian measures which were once used to silence freedom fighters are now being used to silen ce dissent and democratic opposition. All of this makes postcolonial studies more relevant than ever before as it helps us both to understand the contradictions of our pasts which have now taken centre-stage in the present and to explore alternate visions of emancipatory discourses which alone can motivate people to resist the ongoing crisis and move towards a more equitable but harmonious horizon. Whether we at all succeed in our attempts or not, we owe it to our future

generations to continue the struggle with whatever limited resources our academic positions allow us so that at least posterity does not accuse us of being complicit silent collaorators.

It is with this resolve that we continue the academic journey of this journal with this Open Issue of 2022 that focuses on avariety of issues from different corners of the world. We begin with the nomdic explorations of Sadie Barker which offers an intriguing exploration of Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* and the valorised/fetishized trope of the nomad that it foregrounds while relating such investigation to a series of literary texts such as those ofChris McCandles or Jack Kerouac.

This is followed by an article from Uchenna David Uwakwe who explores the 'abiku' figure in various Nigerian literary texts, particularly in Iska, by Cyprain Ekwensi which delves deep into Igbo myths and cultural practices in order to highlight the symbolic resonances which are generated through them by different authors.

The next article, by Ayan Mondal, focuses on the contributions of the famous American author Toni Morrison whose critical works, alongside her novels, have been instrumental in foregrounding the contributions of African-American authors by systematically exposing the racially coinstructed discursive structures through which their accomplishments were ignored, erased or belittled

for decades. Mondal's article not only highlights the literary-historical context out of which such critical pieces were born but also the abiding relevance of her incisive agruments in post-Trump America where white-supremacists are again on the rise and 'race' is as critical as ever in identity formation and political representation.

Almost in acknowledgment of this reality, the next article by Auritro Munshi takes us back to the world of Langston Hughes, another pioneering American poet who was deeply aware of his own African-American identity and the racial villification that his community ha d been sibjected to for centuries. His poetry was a multidimensional struggle against such villification and in view of the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor or Ahmaud Arbery, the relevance of such powerful poetry can hardly be overstated.

Another struggle that has also been going on for decades is that of the Palestinians, particularly since the Nakba of 1948 which has been consistently explored in literary texts by a series of authors including Elias Khoury, the author of such novels as Gate of the Sun and Children of the Ghetto. Omri Ben Yehuda's article focuses on Children of the Ghetto in particular and explores the ironic connections between the Holocaust and the Nakba through an intertextual reading that remains attuned to the inexhaustible nature of the trauma on the one hand and the need to articulate it on the other.

These are followed by a couple of reviews which focus on some of the less-explored voices within the postcolonial specttrum. Long T Bui reviews Phi Su's *The Border Within: Vietnamese Migrants Transforming Ethnic Nationalism in Berlin* explores how the historical process of decolonization and the fissures associated with it have dynamically shaped evolving Vietnamese diasporic experience. In the next review article, Pema Gyalchen Tamang reviews Chuden Kabimo's Song of the Soil which offers an insider's account of the prolonged Girkhland movement within the district of Darjeeling in West Bengal, in India which has hardly received any adequate literary representation so far.

We hope the readers will be intellectually stimulated by these articles and reviews. Over the last six years we have consistently attempted to showcase new and incisive research taking shape within the ever-expanding realm of postcolonial studies and that only becomes possible because of the trust of the contributors, the sustained support of our reviewers and editors and our global readers who keep on reading and downloading the articles we host. Thank you again for everything. We will continue our efforts to remain worthy of your support.

The Nomad and the Postcolonial Limits of A Thousand Plateaus

Sadie Barker

When Chris McCandless' body was found in a Volkswagen just outside Denali National Park, his venture into the Alaskan wilderness would resonate with variance: a principled nomadism; the story of a White, university-educated, upper-class Virginian, and the "deadly allure of proving one's masculinity in the age of late capitalist conveniences"; both an "eco-hero out of place" and a modern-day Thoreau (Hogan, Pursel 78). McCandless' significations were dynamic and predictable. As Craig Medred profiled, McCandless was an archetypical drifter, one to purchase a gun, hunt, and fish on Alaskan parkland without a license, to traverse borders and

boundaries with an ease only granted to a particular subset of wanderers. The colonial imperialist conjuring of Medred's assertions—"that a young man like McCandless should pack up and start hitchhiking north to The Last Frontier [was] an all-too-familiar story"—would be affirmed in the postcolonial dialogue. As Lisa Korteweg and Jan Oakley argue, "McCandless was the ideal Western pure Euro-American eco-hero…well-read but imperviously ignorant of Indigenous knowledge" (136). In the spirit of narrative economies, however, dissenting critique situating McCandless within a colonial frontier-genealogy would be subsumed by Krakauer's 1996 best-selling account. *Into the Wild* would both utilize the frontier's tropes and mythically emancipate them from their power-laden history, consecrating, Medred would argue, McCandless' transition from "poacher to saint" in the settler imagination. In this more hospitable venue, McCandless' nomadism would be elevated beyond its particular bearings on parkland and positionality and rather occupy the unbounded journey from the West to the North, whose elusive lines of flight would cohere with his evasive signification: "Immediately after graduating," Krakauer prefaces, "McCandless' dropped out of sight. He changed his name, gave the savings of his account to charity…abandoned his car…burned all the cash in his wallet. And then he invented a new life for himself, taking up residence at the ragged margin of our society, wandering across North America in search of raw, transcendent experience" (13). Introduced to the

canon of vagabonds and wanderers, *Into the Wild* would become syllabi material across the U.S., spurring annual pilgrimages to the abandoned Volkswagen, some themselves proving fatal. If McCandless' story was all too familiar to some, the resonances of *Into the Wild* would affirm the merits of familiarity, assuring that nomadic frontier stories bear a genealogical lineage of captivation and signification in the contemporary settler imagination.

The significations of the settler-nomad, their wayward cartographies of the wild, affinity for open "uninhabited" land, and mythologized mediation of the frontier's Beauty and Sublime, provokes, contests, and irritates the spatial-temporal assertions of "the postcolonial." In an era whose prefix threatens to subsume its root (and is, hence, fraught with its own signifying dilemmas), McCandless' mythical assemblages animate what Jodi Byrd has identified as the duplicity of "postcoloniality" itself, as an epochal title concealing the unexamined registers of the "late colonial" quotidian[1] . McCandless' simultaneous harkening the colonial frontier and animation

1 Jodi Byrd's insights into the dynamic negotiations between poststructural and postcolonial theory are captured in her explorations of the quotidian aesthetics of late-colonialism, through the frontier-tropes of the Bioshock videogame ("Beast of America"). Moreover, Byrd's T*he Transit of Empire*, expands on the "quandries that poststructuralism has left us: the traces of indigenous savagery and 'Indianness' that stand a priori prior to theorizations of origin, history, freedom, constraint, and difference" (xvii).

of nomadic, anti-capitalist, environmentalist mythology, this paper contends, invokes political ambiguities and interpretive dilemmas symptomatic and descriptive of our "postcolonial" present. Indeed, if myth, as Roland Barthes suggests, is a form of naturalized and depoliticized storytelling, McCandless not only invokes how colonial significations manifest in what is ostensibly "post" colonial cultural production, but moreover, how such significations provoke the limits of postcolonialism's traditionally structuralist interpretive modes of contending with them. Indeed, while McCandless' trek to the Alaskan frontier signified, for some, a well-tread assemblage of colonial nostalgia, the pilgrims who followed invoke acts of re-encoding such assemblages into the cultural and geographic landscape, simultaneously. This relationship of mythologized mapping and tracing, muddling the bounds of "colonial" and "postcolonial" (or, perhaps, anticolonial), might generatively elaborate on what Sara Ahmed has deemed the postcolonial's perpetual sense of "failed historicism" and ability to contend with it; or, alternatively, as Jodi Byrd observes, post-colonialism's interpretive dilemmas amidst the "quandaries that poststructuralism has left us" (xvii). The mythologized settler nomad's signifying intimacy with the colonial frontier bears opportunity to situate the nomad in their political and historical significance; to think beyond the nomad's generally iconized celebration in poststructuralist thought, and towards, rather, their geopolitical contingencies. Such a turn, this paper posits, might invite new, aesthetically and politically oriented modes of contending with the nomad's significations, today.

Indeed, if McCandless' incites anticolonial concern, he is, at least ostensibly, compatible with post-structuralist critique. "Always moving, never stopping," Deleuze and Guattari's un-stillable nomad in *A Thousand Plateaus* adopts unyielding mobility in the pursuit of freedom, or, rather, emancipation from the "imperialisms of the signifying regime" (23). As Deleuze and Guattari assert, it is a "nomadism rather than sedentarity," and specifically, the nomad's exploratory endeavor to "map instead of trac[e]," that renders the nomad antithetical to colonized semiotics and a motif of radical possibility (24)[2] . Yet, if the nomad signifies unfettered possibility in *A Thousand Plateaus*, the nomad's unencumbered cartographies illicit a very different set of postcolonial significations. As Julie Wuthnow argues, in its endeavor to overtake the Rooted Reasonable Man, the Deleuzian nomad deploys the very imperialisms it seeks to destabilize: Semiotic deterritorializations in postcolonial settings, Wuthnow reminds, are notably proximate to the very histories of dispossession they seek to ameliorate. As Byrd asserts, amidst colonial histories and the fraught contemporary language of 'reconciliation,' "indigenous nationalisms

2 While nomadology is explicitly rendered as a mobility and experimentation central to the assemblages of 'Rhizome', nomadism is a critical feature of *A Thousand Plateaus* more broadly. In "The Geology of Morals" 'nomadic singularities' are equated to 'free intensities' (4), central to the restructuring and 'deterritorializing' theoretical project of "differential relations" (5): "Nomadic waves or flows of deterritorialization go from the central layer to the periphery, then from the new center to the new periphery, falling back to the old center and launching forth to the new" (53).

[continue] to depend on signifying regimes, normativities, and assertions of sovereignty ground-ed in the ability to include/exclude" ("Beast of America" 2018 , 16). Implicated in colonial cartographies and heralded within post-structural theories of relationality, the nomad thus enacts the stakes of iconized, semiotic freedom on land where economies of dispossession are themselves premised on colonial systems of "semiotic freedom" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987,15): the movements between "discovery" and conquest, decolonization and metaphor, emptiness and openness, that both condition and obscure the "postcolonial" genealogy and its constituents' collective sense of it.

The endeavor to situate the nomad, hence, necessitates the question of History and its registration. "Written from a sedentary point of view," Deleuze and Guattari assert, history has "never comprehended nomadism"—a genealogical elision that renders the nomad generatively antithetical to History's hierarchal, disciplined, and colonized regimes. "Nomadology" they deduce, "is the opposite of history" (23). And yet, colonial history is a testament to colonialism's nomadic, rhizomatic capacities; that is, the ways in which the frontier has been pursued by those errantly mobile and exploratory. As Mary Pratt's *Imperial Eyes* asserts, such mobilities have long engendered imperialist proceedings: "the signifying practices of travel writing encode and legitimate the aspirations of economic expansion and empire," indicating how planetary and globally-minded conscience have dramatized the nomadic imagination and how the no-

madic imagination has dramatized empire itself (4). The characteristic indecipherability of the nomadic signifier in *A Thousand Plateaus*—a "fuzzy aggregate"[3] (1987, 380)—too evokes imperialism's racial modalities, as Whiteness, Ahmed argues, has always gained its currency and traction "by going unnoticed" (149). Through such a frame, the nomad's semiotic "deterritorializations," equated in *A Thousand Plateaus* with generative "differential relations," evoke the geopolitical deterritorializations endemic to colonial histories of dispossession (5). To consider the positional stakes of the nomad in the postcolonial, it might be inferred, is thus to contend with the colonial-imperialist traces of wayward mobility, and "the long line of continuity between the past and the present that has not been disrupted despite the fact that the stories we tell may or may not acknowledge that continuity" (Byrd 2011, xiv).

It is important to note, however, that the object here is not to trouble nomadology through a causal relation to colonialism itself. Nor is it in the interest of this paper

3 As described in Deleuze and Guattari's comparative discussion of the 'nomad' and the 'migrant': Whereas "the migrant goes principally from one point to another, even if the second point is uncertain" the nomad "does not fulfill the function of the sedentary road" and thus, mobilizes and performs a "space without borders or enclosure" (380). Moving beyond the confines, maps and impositions of the previously enscribed, "the nomos is the consistency of a fuzzy aggregate: it is in this sense that it stands in oppositions to the laws of the polls" (380).

to disavow its affordances towards extensive networks of meaning. Indebted to *A Thousand Plateaus*, Braidotti's 'Nomad Theory' is explicit in its ethical imperatives: "nomadic connection offers at least the possibility of an ethical relation of an opening out toward an empowering connection to others" (3). Braidotti's use of nomad theory is mobilized in the interests of the European migrant crisis, "reconfigur[ing of] national identities" and "decentering Europe" (2) in solidarity with "exiles and refugees…uprooted and forced into dis-identifying with familiar identities" (2006, "Becoming Minoritarian of Europe " 9). Indeed, amidst imposed global mobilities, reconceptualizing bordered nationhood, or "becoming nomadic" anticipates positive transformation: "what is lost in the sense of fixed origins is gained in an increased desire to belong, in a multiple rhizomic manner that overcomes the bilateralism of binary identity formations" (9). Braidotti's 'decentering of Europe' evokes what Mimi Sheller describes as the "unjust power relations of uneven (im)mobilities" comprising the globalizing world, and what May Joseph identifies as its production of nomadic "inauthentic citizens" (3). Collectively, these voices articulate the obverse side of this paper's investment in nomadism's imperial registers, identifying nomadism's imposed states emerging through colonial-imperial expansion, dispossession, and the regulation of borders.

Simultaneously, while emphasizing imposed nomadic conditions, and hence, elucidating nomadism as a

generative frame for minoritarian politics, these voices importantly assert nomadism as a political spectrum. As Sheller writes, "modernity, progress, and privileged forms of white masculinity have long been associated in Western thought with mobility, while immobility, stasis, and sedentary states—or 'bad,' irrational mobilities such as a nomadism, wandering, or vagabondage—have been attributed to 'backward' societies or 'primitive' peoples" (41). Sheller's simultaneous observation that "fantasies such as the open road, the inviting frontier…the conquest of wilderness, or the thrill of acceleration" give rise to configurations of White desirability speaks to the nomadism's polyvalence—as both a site of subjection and appropriation. Importantly, Sheller invites us to take seriously the positional aesthetics of movement alongside structural critiques of mobility. For whom nomadism is imposed, and for whom it is desirable, is a positional politics necessarily undergirding any attempt to deconstruct nomadism's significance, today. As such, investment in the nomad's imperialisms and their aesthetic constitution is not a deviation from investment in nomadism as a frame for exile and regulation, such as Sheller's, but rather, continued inquiry into the 'kinopolitical' continuum of the "present realities that waver between 'freedom and unfreedom" (17). As Sheller notes, the question of "who can 'appropriate' the potential for mobility (including the right to stay still, as well as to move)" is invariably political: "The iconic masculine figures of the explorer, the entrepreneur, and the frontiers-

man require implicit 'others' who do not exercise autonomous self-directed mobility: women, children, slaves, servants, bonded workers, lazy poor, and wild natives" (41).

This paper follows the nomad (and particularly, the mythologized, settler nomad, today) in an attempt to render visible the kinopolitical dynamics of their "postcolonial" mythologization. In tracing the nomad's lines of flight and colonial traces, this paper turns to spaces where the nomad's colonial and poststructuralist ventures intersect: at the frontier, holding and writing the map, on the road, and in videogames. Each of these venues, in different ways, testify to the nomad's duplicitous signification, as both a mediator of colonial-imperialist encroachment and spatialities, and a mapper of poststructuralist theories of relationality seeking to transcend and redefine those very spaces and legacies. More than evoking dualisms, therefore, the nomad's trace testifies to the colonialist trace as, itself, a duplicitous line of flight, evoking the proximities between the colonial deterritorialization and post-structuralist stylistics of unencumbered expansion, proliferation, and movement. To follow the nomad, this paper contends, is to reckon with significance of the frontier—as a signifier of the unknown—and the perspectival, "postcolonial" contingencies between occupied and unoccupied, uninhabited and open, freedom and unfreedom, it incites.

While the frontier in *A Thousand Plateaus* is tied to nomadic mobility ("an ever-receding limit" of "shifting and displaced frontiers" [19]), the frontier, itself, bears a long, situated lineage within settler nomadic imagination. There were Jack Kerouac's Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty, whose lines of flight down the open road would encounter the settler frontier spaces of 1950s America: jazz bars in the US, and a limitless sense of possibility ("nothing behind me, everything ahead," Sal narrates). There was Edward Abbey, whose *Desert Solitaire* would render the Moab Desert a place of such quiet emptiness it elided specificity: "I would rather go hungry in the West" Abbey wrote, "then flourish and flatten in the Siberian East " (1968, 41).." Abbey's affinity for the "empty" and "uncultivated" would adopt new meaning in his anti-immigration stance—a relationship dynamically rendered by Rob Nixon, and anecdotally capturing the politi-cal aesthetics, here, at question. There was Richard Pronekee's *Alone in the Wilderness* (2011) and Grant Hadwin, who, in 1997, swam across the Yakoun River with a chainsaw and cut down the sacred Golden Spruce in the Haida Gwaii archipelago. Hadwin's kayak, later found north of Prince Rupert, would leave many to suspect that his death was faked—that the man, known for his wilderness survival, remained out there in the wild (a narrative so saturated in myth and speculation that John Valiant's "The Golden Bough," *The Golden Spruce*, and the 2015 docu-mentary, *Hadwin's Judgement: Environmentalism, Obsession, Myth*, were destined to succeed). There was

Timothy Treadwell, the New York native who lived and died among the Alaskan grizzlies, immortalized in Warner Herzog's documentary, *Grizzly Man* (2005). Amidst this nexus of frontier mythos, McCandless' adventure marked an addition to a well-established genre of nomadic settler wilderness encounters. Under the directorial gaze of Sean Penn, the acting of Emile Hirsch, and the acoustics of Eddie Vedder, the 2007 film would subsume whatever politi-cal apprehensions lingered about McCandless' venture and scatter them into a collage of literary pastiche (passages from Thoreau and London), "leather-tramp" masculinity, and visual immersion into the Alaskan Sublime. At the height of such powers, we see Hirsch standing atop the abandoned Volkswagen, having just arrived at the Alaskan frontier. His ecstasy is palpable as he addresses the panorama: "Is there anybody here ?" (Penn, 2008). We hear the reverberating silence, see the expansive mountain ranges—are sonically and visually cued that the question is a rhetorical one.

Given the scene's premising on aesthetic "emptiness" and openness, it is fitting that McCandless' frontier-venture would be divisive. The frontier is genealogically bound to its con-testability and conflict—a site, for historians, where powers were spatialized and expanded, and for postcolonialists, wherein narratives of "discovery" and histories of conquest coincide. In the realm of semantics, "frontiers" simultaneous scrutinization for its signifying of colonial, celebratory connotations and de-

fense, for its colonial-historical descriptive utility (Klein), offers apt representation of its broader, "postcolonial" semiotic economies. As Tuck and Yang's critique of decolonization's metaphorical co-option asserts, the "empty signifier" marks a modality of colonial economies, performing language's contingencies within a regime where contradictory decolonial desires can be equivocated through the "empty signifier…filled by any track towards liberation" (7). Tuck and Yang's wariness evokes the proximate dynamics of no-madic signification, and its relationship to the settler state. As Leanne Simpson asserts, government-sanctioned decolonial gestures, from the TRC to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, present both a "mechanism for account for past injustices" and simultaneously perform how "Indigenous grief can be managed, exploited and used by the state to placate Indigenous resistance" (238). Simpson's critique extends the bearings of the empty signifier beyond semantic linguistics to an apparatus of late-colonialism itself, echoing Glen Coulthard's assertions into the recognition paradigm, as colonialism's liberal pluralist valence, re-inscribing the settler-state through a "conciliatory set[s] of discourses and institutional practices that emphasize [Indigenous] accommodation" (6). These voices emphasize the stakes of the "postcolonial" signifier, as operative in an economy of de-signifying and re-signifying, wherein colonization occurs both through outward dispossession and semiotic regimes. As Ann Laura Stoler affirms, the col-

ony is a place of "violent circulation… not a place but a principle of managed mobilities, mobilizing and immobilizing populations according to a set of changing rules and hierarchies that orders social kinds…" (41). The frontier's morphologies—from an overt signifier of colonial cartographies and geopolitics to an imagined space of nomadic attachment—is but one method of contending with colonialism's "violent circulation" in myth's ostensibly depoliticized realm.

Hirsch's victorious performance, as an aesthetic-affective relation to the Alaskan frontier, thus performs the frontier's signifying intimacy with both "postcolonial" nomadic errancy and harkening of colonial trope. In that sense, the scene invokes the frontier's broader negotiations in historical and anticolonial scholarship. Associated with the meta-narratives of colonial encounter, the 'frontier' (or, the "F word") Kerwin Lee Klein argued, testified, generatively, to its own colonialist trace. Equating eradication of colonial signifiers with the perils of exoneration, Klein rendered terminological siege of frontier, in burgeoning anticolonial semantics, both a futile and misguided attempt to depart from colonial and imperialist registers. Not only was the choice of New Western Regionalists to "replace 'frontier' with [the 'Orientalist'] 'West,' more than faintly ironic," Klein asserted, it overlooked the persistence of the 'frontier' in the contemporary imagination (182). Frederic Jackson Turner's 1893 assertions into the "Significance of the

Frontier" and its "white, male, midwestern, heterosexual, middle-class" assemblages, Klein argued, perpetually animated "constructions of group identities [bound in] in historical consciousness" and too, contemporary spatial-temporal assertions" (200). Turner's 'frontier,' which "did not empty Native America of people but placed it in the past" was a historical meta-narrative, Klein's work implied, resonating in contemporary semiotic economies, and thus, a crucial signifier in tracing persistent colonial imagination in the "postcolonial" epoch (186).

Klein's defense of "frontier" sits at the juncture of post-structuralist and decolonial thought, both advocating the utility of the meta-narrative signifying regimes to which nomadology is antithetically positioned, and simultaneously emphasizing the descriptive inaccuracies of the "postcolonial". Klein's meta-narrative assertion could, indeed, be critiqued from a Deleuzian vantage—an endeavor that would likely yield generative emphasis on the utility of colonial 'meta-narrative' to-wards the often-bigoted tendencies of its contemporary "free speech" resonances. Yet, in his assertion that non-genealogical geographic abstraction is, itself, symptomatic of Western history, Klein's position bears proximity to decolonial critiques of nomadic, de-signifying practice—a seemingly paradoxical relationship gesturing the complexity of the signifying regime nomadology seeks to disrupt. The colonialist trace, Byrd argues, as a signifying trail of late-colonialism, is too a marker of the

deflective inclinations of poststructuralist "flattening" which, in occluding colonial genealogy, is too occlusive of Indigenous resistance, determination, and signifying practice: "every time flow or a line of flight approaches, touches, or encounters Indianness, it also confronts the colonialist project that has made that flow possible. The choice is to either confront that colonialism or deflect it" (17). Byrd's assertions trouble notions of "decolonization" as a terminological, theoretical, or disciplinary practice of de-signifying and re-signifying, invoking the utility of the colonial signifier as an index to the late-colonial present. These traces, Byrd as-serts, "are vitally important to understanding how power and domination have been articulated and practiced by empire" (xvii). As Alex Young's discussion of transformations in the field of Postwestern studies suggests, the field has been marked by notable shift from Klein's frontier-based attention to "transnational processes of European settler conquests of indigenous peoples" and towards a "postmodern resistance to historical meta-narratives" methodologically deploying the 'rhizomatic's west's' re-spatializing, non-genealogical utility (115). As Young argues, such turns invoke a new set of concerns, namely, the "strategic essentialism" of the "reproduction [of] frontier tropes" of west-ward expansion that inform and yet, simultaneously, elide, historical deconstruction (119).

If *Into the Wild*'s iconic scene performs the frontier's duplicity, at the juncture of colonial historicity and post-

colonial mythmaking, these relations find more specific enunciation in relation to the map. The film's portrayal of McCandless' forgoing the map in favor of spontaneous roaming and practice of retrospectively carving representations of visited places into his leather belt, affirm McCandless' nomadic spirit and broader post-structuralist cartographies. "Always a map and never a tracing," Deleuze and Guattari's unstillable nomad's forgoing of the map, and rather, practice of creating the map, is a crucial emblem of the cartographic politics of *A Thousand Plateaus* (13). As Deleuze and Guattari assert, it is through the maps' disavowal—that is, the practicing of "acentered, nonhierarchal, non-signifying system[s]" of movement and relations that "centered (even polycentric) systems with hierarchal modes of communication and pre-established paths" might become undone (21). This imperative echoes throughout McCandless' forgoing of map-tracing and practice of spontaneous map-making. Yet, as Peta Mitchell's work suggests, while antithetically stylized, these maps—one traditionally cartographic, one improvised—are not opposite, but continuations: "Just as the map metaphor underwent a revision in the later twentieth century, the subject has similarly been reconfigured, as not a traditional cartographer who delimits space, but as a nomad who traverses it" (2008, 77). It is, Wuthnow's work elaborates, the Deleuzian aversion to a "politics of location" (2002, 183), engendering a "politics of disappearance of local or indigenous knowledge systems" (185) that renders

the rhizomatic map so proximate to the very imperialist cartographies it seeks to transcend. Wuthnow's claims gesture a dialectic tending to the maps' broader political imagination. While mapping "was a historically contingent process" its "profusion of geographic metaphors" have rendered its associations more interpretively daunting than the map itself: "very little scholarly attention has interrogated the geographic imaginations behind these metaphors, that made possible the variety and durability of knowledge production and power structures" (15).

Yet, imperialist stylistics have not evaded scrutiny. As Pratt describes, traveler's ac-counts, spanning 18th century European writings to the 1980s postcolonial "consisted of convert-ing local knowledges (discourses) into European national and continental knowledges associated with European forms" (1992, 198). Indeed, imperialist mapping bore an "implicit reproduction of a universalized western subject and its delegitimization of 'experience' and 'local knowledge'" that sought to "explain 'the natives' both to the West and Indigenous peoples themselves' (Wuthnow 2002, 183). In considering geographic imaginations behind these travelers' accounts, a hasty, consumptive interpretation is conjured, both in its broad reach and scope and in its acts of 'translation' and distortions of scale. Through Pratt and Wuthnow's frames, the rhizome motifs of "Indians without ancestry" and "ever-receding limit" invoke a particular aesthetic politics, inseparable from the project

of empire (Deleuze and Guattari). As Young asserts, the

> ...rhetoric of US empire often privileges expansivity and openness over 'inward-looking, root-ed containment…While the rhizomatic lines of flight opened by the deterritorializing process of settler colonial expansion in the western United States might have opened up new freedoms for settlers…[they] surely did not offer an 'alternative to' or 'escape from' the sovereign powers of the settler state for indigenous people (123).

Moreover, if, as Young asserts, there is "something about the US west…that makes it especially rhizomatic" for Deleuze and Guattari, that affinity is, palpable in rhizome's stylistics, and their "remarkable alliance with [Kerouac's] poetics" (Abel 2002, 228). In this broader exploration of nomadic aesthetic imperialisms, these poetics warrant a quick detour. In an exploration of speed in *On the Road*, Eftychia Mikelli identifies Kerouac's iconic "speedy typing" (without "room for editing") as both a symbolic rejection of "1950s materialistic culture" (the "homogenization suggested by the uniformity of typed characters") and, in his run-on sentences, a stylistic departure from the "slow, deliberate sentences of the dominant modernist tradition" (142). These deviations from dominant style, Mikelli asserts, conditioned *On the Road*'s thematic pacing—a novel whose characters traversed the land without "time for reflective or substantial understanding of their environment" (142). Speed in

the novel hence "initiates a new manner of perception, whereby conventional definitions of place are substituted by the annihilation of territorial space" (144). Yet, simultaneously, *On the Road*'s pacing betrays a "fascination with accel-eration in motion" typical of 1950s America (145). Mikelli's assertions invite broader consideration of *On the Road*'s context: the Cold War, the Korean War, the military eclipsing of Britain in the Middle East, but also, the proliferation of American capital (Hollywood and cars), keeping tempo with Sal and Dean's rebelliously fast lines of flight. As Abel and Young assert, these po-litical-aesthetics would extend their influence to *A Thousand Plateaus* thirty years later—an assertion affirmed in 'nomadology's' restless, ever-outward ever-onward ontology, and heralding of "nomadism as the movement (keep moving, even in place, never stop moving, motionless voyage, desubjectification)" (159). These aesthetic phenomenologies, hence, complicate Deleuze and Guattari's anti-imperial semiotics, indicating how motifs such as the "ever receeding limit" and "always moving" oppose, but also, emerge through, global contexts of imperial relations. Movement "is both a political economy, which is distributed unevenly between others, and an affective economy, which leaves its impressions, affecting those bodies that are subject to its address" (Ahmed 2007, 161). Joseph's Nomadic Identities captures this relationship saliently, observing how "within globalizing discourses of transnational exchange, the seductive metaphors of heightened mobility, advanced at

the expense of the political, generated anxiety around the local" (8).

If imperialist cartographies—their affinity for speed and anxieties around the local—are alive in the signifying relations between Kerouac, and Deleuzian and Guattarian aesthetics, their presence amidst decolonial pursuits indicates how nomadic anti-imperialisms might reproduce the very imperialisms they seek to transcend. As Sarah Leeuw and Sarah Hunt's study of decolonial geography suggests, motions to decolonize cartographies and spatial theory are nonetheless laden with the colonial legacies they seek to ameliorate: "decolonizing efforts across disciplinary boundaries continue to grapple with the tensions inherent to a project always at risk of reproducing its own imperial authority" (Leeuw and Hunt 2018, 10). Decolonizing geography, they assert, necessitates introspection; "decolonial geographers often continue to engage concepts of indigeneity rather than Indigenous peoples themselves, their scholarship, their lived experience, and knowledge contributions" (6) risking "normalizing non-Indigenous ways of knowing and being and perpetuating colonial power" (3). The nomadic imperialist imagination, their work suggests, persists in the de-signifying inclinations of decolonial geographies, fraught with its enduring anxiety about the local. "Indigenous peoples are facing mass arrests in Standing Rock North Dakota [and, more recently, Wet'suwet'en]…to not acknowledge these contexts risks per-petuating the idea

that writing and knowledge is not produced in places, many of which are forged in ongoing colonial violence" (2). Leeuw and Hunt's critique asserts the imperialism of "abstract geography" and the potentials of decolonial mapping beyond de-centered or non-signifying approaches. Leanne Simpson's "maps of loss" offers one, concrete enactment of this, and emerges from an intergenerational collaborative process of writing directly on the colonial map itself. The "over lays" Simpson reflects, "showed decade after decade of loss. They showed the why…" (15). Likewise, Angie Morrill, Eve Tuck, and the Super Futures Haunt Qollective paradigm of the "aching archive" imagines mapping beyond remapping, tending, rather, to the 'postcolonial's' cartographic wake: "cartographies of struggle…cartographies of dispossession—the kinds that rip away, distances, alienates" (4). Collectively, these frameworks gesture the function of the colonialist trace in postcolonial theories of space. As Morrill, Tuck et. al assert, the "opposite of dispossession" is not re-spatializing but "unforgetting" (2).

The legacies of the postcolonial, settler-nomad—their history of movement, of mapping, and spatializing—thus ensures a nomadism that is necessarily bound to its positional dilemmas. Val Plumwood's 1995 account of nearly being prey to an alligator is framed by the postcolonial contingencies of nomadic inclination: the traversing of boundaries ("I had never been one for timidity…so I decided to explore further a clear, deep channel closer

to the river" [Plumwood, 1995, 29]) and simultaneously, "the indigenous Gagadgu owners of Kakadu, whose advice and permission to come [there she] had not sought" (30). Rob Nixon's account of white, South African lion hunters conjures a nomadic hunger for 'wild Africa' (160)--one of "authenticity that couldn't be bought elsewhere" (161) whose satiation is contingent on the park's "racial and temporal enclave" outside of Black, South African empowerment, functioning "inimically to political transformation" (160). Julietta Singh's description of the Canadian cut-block conjures the nomadic ethos of tree planting—a 'rite of passage' and "subculture comprised of mostly young, white urbanites" (154)—as too, culturally contingent on its 'postcolonial' enclave: "The hardest work, the wildest parties, the closest to nature… unfurled alongside—and because of—environmental destruction…undertaken on unceded indigenous territory, with indigenous com-munities having scarce (if any) input about or benefit from the destruction of their lands"—a dynamic 'unbeknownst' to many planters (156). These accounts invoke return to the 'frontier,' tes-tifying to the perseverance of a Turnerian "frontier synthesis" in the nomadic imagination, one of wild and civilized dichotomies, where 'uncultivated emptiness' reifies a "fetishization of a fron-tier mythos" and tacitly, Indigenous erasure (Byrd 2018, 611). Yet too, these accounts, critically and consciously, invoke the potentials of the colonialist trace in mapping the nomad's frontier affinities, treating the residues of the colonial imperial-

ist vantage as introspective sites of nomad-ic complicity, pervading questions of positionality, aesthetics, imagination, and desire—a praxis Singh deems, of cultivating discomfort. Singh's phrase is useful for its wayward semiotics. Signifying both the fetishized discomforts of the nomadic planter ("the bodies return to uncultivated states were extraordinary badges of honour" [Singh, 2017,156]) and their elusive modes of com-plicity, Singh differentiates nomadic aesthetics from their decolonial, de-signifying, or non-hierarchal imperative.

Let us, then, return to the ecstasy of the image. While McCandless (it was speculated) would starve in the Alaskan wilderness, his initial encounter at the frontier would suggest his hunger for 'raw, transcendent experience' was satiated. If the nomad has a duplicitous relation to the postcolonial's imperialist residue, the scene's mediation of Beauty and the Sublime testifies to the outwardly colonizing force of aesthetics themselves ("History is Painted by the Victors," Kent Monkman's 2013 painting's title asserts). Indebted to the colonization of aesthesis (sense) Aesthetic Theory, Walter Mignolo and Rinaldo Vazquez argue, inherently performs the dynamics of imperial power. Beginning with Kantian, transcendentalist conflations of the singular and the universal, the "regulation [of the] sensing of the beautiful and the sublime" and finally, the "regulation [of the] global capability to 'sense' the beautiful and the sublime," Aesthetic Theory signals the everyday residues of colonial vantage

(Mignolo and Vazquez, 2013, 203). In the context of what Mignolo terms 'decolonial aesthesis' (critical examination of how mega-categories such as 'beauty' or 'representation' have come to dominate aesthetic valuation), McCandless' nomadic pursuit of the frontier's uncultivated and empty expanse does not seem a venture into the wild but affirmation of the signifier's domestication within the late-colonial regime. In the paintings of Monkman, alternatively, the 'nomad's lines of flight are rendered palpable and pre-dictable: the well-established assemblages of cowboys, rangers, and icons of an unlawful the wild west. Monkman aesthetically affirms what this paper, in a roundabout way, has striven to assert: the post-structural nomad's occupation is not the opposite of colonial imperial history, but is a testament to its style.

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The 'Abiku-Soul' Regurgitation in Cyprain Ekwensi's Iska Narrative

Uchenna David Uwakwe

Introduction

The novel *Iska* validates the measure of nationalist coverage in Ekwensi's creative works, sustaining the author's inclination to (re)presenting significant subject matters in the epochs of the development of Nigerian/African fiction. After his novella *When Love Whispers* was published, Ekwensi's *People of the City* had come, projecting the smooth transition from the era of Onitsha Market literature to that of the immediate post-colonial writ-

ings. With the intractable emergence of urban influences on African morality, Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana* and its follow up *Jagua Nana's Daughter* portray measures of vulgarity implicating the wave of sudden city life. Nonetheless, with his picaresque *Survive the Peace*, and the novel *Divided We Stand*, Ekwensi had made such remarkable contribution to the literatures of the Nigeria-Biafra War of 1967 to 1970, which variously implicated the colonial experience.

Ekwensi's characterization, setting and subject matter have always been made to justify a measurable spread across the Nigerian geographical space. The *Iska* narrative which begins in Kaduna as the suggested capital of Northern Nigeria, relates this story of an Igbo girl that was born in the north, who moves back home to the East at the death of her father and then also, after the news of her Fulani-born husband's demise, chooses to relocate to Lagos. In so doing, the protagonist is made to journey across the three major regions of Nigeria bearing the *abiku* death warrant. In regurgitating *Abiku* as myth, the protagonist Filia is superficially invested with the *Abiku* 'soul'. Ekwensi employs such symbolic hypallage by which the 'soul' of Abiku is made to migrate from the body of Filia into the Nigerian nation-state. Ekwensi elects an Hausa-word title, *Iska*, with an Igbo-girl protagonist, Filia Enu who is saddled with a 'soul', termed in Yoruba as *Abiku*. It is in this configuration that this depiction obtains the required spread

within the Nigerian society. The metaphysical surmise that man is made up of spirit, soul and body is considered to depict the constrained unanimity among the ethnic groups/regions in Nigeria, especially the major three (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba). The conjecture becomes strong in this discourse that the *Abiku* death-portent in African thought is believed to come from a certain world of the 'spirit' to retrieve its migrated 'soul'.

Literature Review

In William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night,* there are speculations on the 'soul's immortality' which justify that Ekwensi's metaphysical retrospection is not altogether outlandish. Firstly, it comes in pitching Clown and Olivia against each other thus:

> Clown: Good madonna, why mourn'st thou?
> Olivia: Good fool, for my brother's death.
> Clown: I think his soul is in hell, madonna.
> Olivia: I know his soul is in heaven, fool.
> (Shakespeare 2010, 348).

Clown intends here to lighten Olivia's mood by shifting the discussion on her beloved deceased brother's death to the probable destination of his 'soul'. Within another dialogue, Shakespeare also re-images a speculation on the 'soul' at the scene where Clown asks Malvolio to explain "the opinion of Pythagoras concerning wild fowl".

In this instance, Malvolio's response is that, "the soul of our grandma might haply inhabit a bird" (Shakespeare 2010, 357). Here, Shakespeare implicates the Pythagorean philosophy not just as one unique perspective to the 'death/soul' inquisition, but also in the circumstance that Malvolio's unbecoming and lunatic-seeming disposition was made more sarcastic. Jerry Obi-Okogbuo identifies how the ethical theory of Pythagoras became a derivation from the Greek mystery and morality consciousness known as 'orphism'. Obi-Okogbuo situates 'orphism' within the religiosity that pertained stringently to, "metempsychosis (i.e. reincarnation or transmigration of souls or rebirth of the soul in other bodies)" (2011, 139).

Christopher Nwodo cites Aristotle in theorizing the 'soul' as, "non-material, non-perishable substance that forms part of the human being" (2004, 179). The literary impetus of the Abiku 'soul' explored in *Iska* connects with the separate '*Abiku*' poems' by both Wole Soyinka and John Pepper Clark (who later preferred to be called Clark-Bekederemo). Their submissions which first appeared in *Black Orpheus 10* at the very dawn of Nigeria's postcolony was later published in an anthology, *A Selection of African Poetry*, edited by Kojo Senanu and Theo Vincent. In an annotation, Senanu and Vincent submit a broader space by which Abiku is implicated as, "Yoruba word for a child born to die young and to be re-born by the same woman over and over and again. Among

the Igbo such a child is known as ogbanje and among the Akan (Ghana) as *kosama*." (Clark 1988, 205). Chinelo Eze's appraisal of *Abiku* also provides the names in other Nigerian cultural domains–in Efik as *Mfumfum* and in Edo as *Igbakhun*.

In each instance of a parallel rendition of '*Abiku*' by Clark and Soyinka, there is usually an air that the personas, the mother and supposedly the daughter respectively, are engaged in a dialogue. The persona in Soyinka's poem who is the *abiku*-child boasts of certain invincibility against the magical powers derivable in sacrificial objects–yams, goats, cowries, ash, palmoil, etc. These items for sacrifice were contrived to frustrate the *Abiku*-child's repeated birth, death and re-birth. Soyinka's persona, the *Abiku*-child proclaims: "In vain your bangles cast/ Charmed circles at my feet/ I am abiku calling for the first and the repeated time/ must I weep for goats and cowries/ For palmoil and sprinkled ash…". (Soyinka 1988, 189). On the other hand, J.P. Clark elects the *Abiku*-mother as persona in his own 'Abiku' poem. It is the *Abiku*-mother who is made to passionately plead with the *Abiku*-child to stay and not to die any longer: "Then step in, step in and stay/ For her body is tired". (Clark 1988, 204-205). Yet, the mood in both verses by Soyinka and Clark exudes the pervading aura of the implacable death-harbinger, the Abiku-spirit.

Douglas McCabe gives exposition to the three ways

by which the *Ifa Babalawo*, known in Yoruba as "father-of-secrets" (2002, 46), cages the *Abiku* spirit: by blocking the path to its mother's womb or the road to its death; by revealing its secret and making its evil identity known, and lastly by disguising the *Abiku*-child so that when her evil peers (egbe) come to take her away, the child's body becomes unidentifiable. The acquaintance with the early psychoanalysts, especially Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung implicate a resort to the speculative domains that integrate religion, philosophy and mythology into the metaphysical reality–a reality that undertakes the search for solutions with a certain shift from the empirical science procedure. Ann Dobie recognizes how Freud as neurologist in the nineteenth century "was troubled that he could not account for the complaints of many of his patients by citing any physical cause" (51). Alex Asakitikpi's study of *Ogbanje* reveals, "how the lives of children below five hang precariously on this cultural belief" (2008). Resulting from his study of *Ogbanje*, Asakitikpi affirms that the mortality rate of children was still high in spite of the government's measures against childhood diseases in Nigeria.

Parallelism: The Realms of the Abiku World

The symbolism which Ekwensi overlays in *Iska* appears inclined to M.A.R. Habib's analogy that, "the psychoanalyst creates a coherent narrative about the patient within which the traumatic event can take its place and be

understood" (234). Considering also that Ekwensi who had been trained as Pharmacist became more involved in writing, it is imperative to interrogate the design as well as objective for which the author portrays the *Abiku* character in *Iska*, adopting its 'soul' as apposite symbolism for appreciating the ailments in the 'body' of Nigerian nationhood. But, it seems also that the problem of forestalling the repeated occurrence of the *Abiku*-child's death assumes a milder temperament than the 'soul' becomes in the 'body' of a nation with such myriad of ethnic and political sentiments. Ekwensi' s option is considered to parallel the second approach which McCabe associates with the *Ifa Babalawo* – 'revealing its secret and making its evil identity known'.

The metaphysical reality in *Iska* yields another epistemological impetus to what obtained when the pioneers of African literature grappled with all of what came under the umbrella of 'the big issues of Africa'. In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* for instance, one may elicit two different suggestions to the health challenges that were associated with the fits of Ezinma's *Ogbanje* character. The first is the physical manifestation of *iba* (malaria), for which Okonkwo's knowledge of herbal medicine, a certain instinct of science, instructed his search for the required herbs in the bush (Achebe 1958, 60). The other, which is rather metaphysical, effuses in the search for where Ezinma's *Iyi uwa*, the speculated totem of her avowed destiny in the spiritual world, was bur-

ied. The narrative voice in *Things fall Apart* is recalled thus: "Everyone knew then that she would live because her bond with the world of *ogbanje* had been broken" (Achebe 1958, 64). With regard to science, Christopher Nwodo observes that, "The non-Western peoples, Africans in particular, are made to feel and think that man's marvellous achievements in science and technology are specifically Western and not human in general…" (2004, 312). Interestingly, the urge to respond to these 'big issues' in a 'tit for tat' attitude to Western derogation had to give way to the more (pro)active approach, that is, precluding their debilitating brunt on African art.

Unfortunately, the works of Amos Tutuola–*My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954) and *The Palmwine Drinkard* (1961), which were among Africa's earliest published narratives with magical realist tint, met with such negative criticisms as would have dissuaded the efforts of other writers in same inspiration. While the shoddy language of literary expression became the crux of the challenge against Tutuola, Achebe says: "I still believe that Tutuola's critics in Nigeria missed the point. The beauty of his tales was fantastical expression of a form of indigenous Yoruba, therefore African, magical realism" (TWAC, 113) Perhaps, Achebe supposes that the occurrence of Tutuola's bizarre language was requisite in portraying the giddiness of the 'palm wine drinkard' himself as protagonist. It could also be seen to approximate the indistinct speech patterns in the 'bush of ghost' locale, where the spirit characters (some multi-headed), are said to speak

mostly through their noses.
But, the suggestions above may not have quashed the arguments of the African critics who contended that works of African literature, not written in African languages, were simply void of identity. Manifestly, Obiajunwa Wali's title, "The Dead End of African Literature?", was as lethal as his thesis statement that reads: "PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT ACHIEVEMENT of the last conference of African writers of English Expression held in Makerere College, Kampala, in June 1962, is that African literature as now defined and understood, leads nowhere" (2007, 281). Wali's paper, represented a prominent logic by advocates of the native usage in African literature.

Achebe who looked beyond the language question also saw in the contents of magical realism, a possible adoption of their symbolisms. In Achebe's words, "Crossroads possess a certain dangerous potency. Anyone born there must wrestle with their multiheaded spirits and return to his or her people with the boon of prophetic vision, or accept, as I have, life's interminable mysteries" (TWAC, 8). Esiaba Irobi considers that theorizing culture is, "an attempt to make sense of how and why we create or make things, structures, ideas, institutions, art in a given society. Its primary functions are to encode,…" (2009, 10). Isidore Diala recognizes how the structuring of such theories have yielded "distinctive Nigerian examples of hybridity arising from conflating myths of only approximate relationships and cultural

models"(2014, 196). To consider that Diala became fascinated with Irobi's efforts in regenerating the creative processes in society is justified in the emerging writers of 'Afrofuturism' writers – Nnedi Okorafor, Deji Bryce Olukotun, Tochi Onyebuchi and more.

Bode Sowande considers *Abiku* as a spirit that fragments its soul, stringing it in many human lives across many centuries. With each fragment of re-presenting the *Abiku* 'soul', clearer insights of its character emerge, just as other matters in magical realism are variously expressed. Ikenna Kamalu and Ebuka Igwebuike engage a more expansive discourse of the magical realist perspectives in Ben Okri's (Abiku) trilogy: *The Famished Road, Songs of Enchantment* and *Infinite Riches*. Kamalu and Igwebuike cite the three vital paradigms provided for the classification of narrators by Bradford (1997): the extradiegetic narrator, autodiegetic narrator and intradiegetic narrator. Their observation is that Okri underscores the relevance of 'focalization', creating the preferred space with either measures of the distance or the closeness between his varied narrators and the reader. Kamalu and Igwebuike conclude that Okri's "unwillingness to surrender the narrative space to Azaro"(2009, 165), constitutes a weakness in his style. The Abiku-persona at the opening lines of Soyinka's poem is not just boastful but also intuitive in communicating its identity. The authority of the spirit-world is seen in the perspective of Soyinka's

persona, to superimpose itself above the human world.

Assuming the role of the narrator, Filia reveals how her psychological disposition straddles two worlds, the 'conscious' and 'unconscious'. The narrative voice says: "my mother took me to see a fortune-teller. I was about five then. I remember. Do you know what he said? He did not mince words. You will die young. That's what he said. I cannot believe it, but sometimes I see signs that it may be true…" (2007, 35). As Filia slickly takes up the fortune-teller's voice, it is to reveal her own personality. Here, Ekwensi provokes a connection between a human-world (socio-cultural) identity for his protagonist and a more intricate posture of the (super)natural that becomes somewhat intangible. Sowande affirmation regarding Okri's *The Famished Road* is that "The gods have their pantheon, the dead their world, the unborn their void, the spirits of all the elements the space which they share or contest with humans" (2007, 73). Filia is simply made to reveal how she attains the realization that her human identity as is subordinated by a more forceful and even malicious investment of the *abiku* 'soul'. Deeper still, Filia grows to discover how her entire life and existence are constrained in a world where the virtues of humanism are also subordinated. It becomes pertinent to appreciate how the transmigration of the 'soul' into the 'body' of Filia Enu as protagonist of *Iska* evokes pertinent symbols that also connect with the myths in

the Soyinka/Clark 'Abiku' poems.

Ekwensi's choice of *Iska* as title, is not a mere tangential recollection of the word 'wind'(2007, 5), which the enchantments of the mallam-fortune teller associates with the protagonist, Filia Enu, but an evocation of a peculiar world of alternating reality. In Filia's mother's voice, much more is revealed:

> My daughter…Filia…I do not understand…Her actions fill me with fear…I tell you, she acts in a way to confuse anyone. Ever since she was born it's been like that, Delicate. Yet having her own way. Lovable…her father always let her be: He said she is an Ogbanje… one who comes to this world again and again. Her life is like wind"(Ekwensi 2007, 210).

These revelations of Filia's character which situate her spirit-human identity, also realize the already obliterated boundaries in the geographical space between the spirit and human worlds. It therefore seems as though the reference to Filia's Igbo village Ogabu, and the northern city of Kaduna obtain the human world geographical space while the nomenclature 'Nigeria' becomes the invisible spirit world, indeed a world whose humanity has been invalidated by the more death-borne tribal sentiments. These are the same tribal sentiments that led to the death of Dan Kaybi, Filia's illegitimately married husband, Filia's brother and also Filia's father, Uzodike

Enu.

The reader learns from Filia that Dan Kaybi does not really belong to the world of the northerners: "Dan Kaybi does not care where you come from! To him, you are a man and he judges you by what you do, not what part of Africa you come from. He does not care a thing about tribe," (Ekwensi 2007, 66). It is the same with Filia's father, Uzodike. In Filia's memory, it is revealed that, "Papa left here over thirty years ago and settled in Northern Nigeria among Hausas and Fulanis and Kanuris. He brought us up to like people, not their tribes!"(Ekwensi 2007, 66). Both men who are re-presented as belonging to Filia's 'choice' world, are made to possess the enchanting kind of spirit which their generation lacks. Filia's mother observes about Filia that, "some of the things you do and say make me think that you have more wisdom than your age entitles you to have"(Ekwensi 2007, 137). And about Dan Kaybi whose father expressed similar stupefaction, Filia says: "He came from Nupe and Fulani parents but he thought in terms of the humanity of the nation. He listens to the other man's opinion and judged every issue on its own particular merits"(Ekwensi 2007, 77).

Intriguingly too, Ekwensi configures a symbolic relationship between Filia and the three characters whose deaths come off the inhuman sentiments associated with tribal obsession in the country. While it is only through a flashback that the death incidences of Filia's father and her

brother are recounted, the mystery in Uzodike's death is explained as a machination of the human world where evil prevails. The death of her husband Dan Kaybi comes in Nida's report: "He went to drink in his bar… The service girl went to take the order, the Hausa boys refused, called her back. The Ibo boys got angry… That was it. Clash! Dan Kaybi–you know him for that–tried to intervene. They knifed him"(Ekwensi 2007, 68-69). Nida's story certifies the gloomy mood of the postcolony expressed in the feelings of tribal superiority. The voice of Dan Kaybi's father reads that, "You are my son; and we come from Nupe land. Our kingdom was founded by Tsoede. We are masters of the River Niger"(Ekwensi 2007, 31). On the other hand, there is the tribal sentiment expressed by the Igbo: "At that time, if an Ibo man went to Northern Nigeria to live, the Ibos counted him as a lost man. To the people of Ogabu your father was a dead man"(Ekwensi 2007, 53). Iska resonates the cumulative views that have continued to raise questions on the survival of Nigeria's nationhood, as it is with the survival of the Abiku-child.

Ekwensi portrays how the *Abiku* character is often constrained within the feminine 'body' and how the fury with which it beckons on its 'soul' also implicates a certain regard for (wo)manhood. Without doubt, the *Ogbanje* spirit as known among the Igbo is hardly ever given a masculine personality. In Achebe's *Things Fall Apart,* Ezinma suffers *Ogbanje* fits while it is Chielo the priest-

ess that exorcises her malevolent spirit. Catherine Bicknell says: "When Chielo is speaking for the Oracle of the Hills and Caves, there is no male in the community, no matter what his status, who can dispute her authority"(1996, 267). In *Iska*, Ekwensi succeeds in accomplishing a prominent design that is adjudged to enforce the survival of the African writer's art by presenting the feminity of Filia in a more adorable stance than the Jagua Nanas, subscribing to the era in the wake of African feminism when the view of (wo)manity began to acquire a more endearing outlook among male writers. For instance, in Achebe's last novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*, there is a marked shift in what had been conceived as the disparaging instinct of male-narratives against women.

Grace Okereke affirming about Beatrice in *Anthills,* says that, "She resents the male assumption that woman is man's property to be ordered about as tradition would have us believe" (1996, 306). Ekwensi's proclivity to re-shaping the prostitute-image in his earlier works is substantiated in the ostensibly delightful kind of stubbornness that Filia represents. It is such image of a woman, unlike the prostitute, who prefers to guard her honour and personality by rejecting the obsessions of material possessions. Filia condemns Nafotim's gifts in the manner that Soyinka's *Abiku*-child denounces the potency in the items of sacrifice–goats and cowries. She says: "I like men who are elegant and civilized, not just those who think their money can buy me" (Ekwensi

2007, 65). And, in another instance Filia recounts, "He called there ten times a day, making all kinds of attractive offers, leaving behind gifts of money and food" (Ekwensi 2007, 70). Another serious point is raised by Filia's friend Remi: "A girl may have a lot of men friends when she is well and beautiful. But when she is very ill, it's different"(Ekwensi 2007, 115). Speaking to her mother, Filia emphasizes that, "I hate to have men hang over me like flies… just because they want something out of me and nothing else. Something to play with and forget…" (Ekwensi 2007, 161). Filia's rejection of the gifts recollects the voice of *Abiku* in Soyinka's line: "in vain your bangles cast…"(Ekwensi 2007, 189).

The manner in which Ekwensi undertakes an emasculation of the male characters, justifies how the potency of the *Ogbanje/Abiku* 'spirit' could unleash impotency on its victims. Without an earlier indication in the novel that Gadson Salifas was impotent until the encounter with Filia, Ekwensi proverbially observes: "He could not rise to meet the occasion. He was like a hungry man who is offered the choicest dish and suddenly his appetite vanishes"(Ekwensi 2007, 124). Gadson confesses that he hadn't experienced such in his manhood before. In the same vein, the *Ogbanje/Abiku* spirit which supposedly pushes Abigel, Gadson's wife to run to the beach-side prophet, might as well be held responsible for the eventual death of the prophet, Piska Dabra. The mystery in Dabra's death gives another clue to a more terrible emas-

culation of Piska Dabra, along with his religion. This sustains the *Ogbanje/Abiku* authority in a compelling tenacity that frees the 'soul' from being caged in the world of man's inhumanity to man.

Ekwensi is inclined to portraying Dabra's religion in the enforcements of religious promiscuity. It comes as a philosophy which ridicules acts where the world of reality is abandoned for vain fantasies. The politician Nafotim, whose gifts Filia had rejected, was unrelenting. He kept persuading her into illicit affairs even with the gift of a rented apartment. That Filia threw away the key to that apartment into the lagoon is symbolic of the *Abiku* obstinacy. While there are instances of brazen extra-marital affairs in offices involving the boss and his secretary and the type in clubs Ekwensi yields Remi this derisive tone: "Just imagine! They come with their husbands but they don't know their rivals. Half of the men here I have seen naked"(Ekwensi 2007, 98). It is even so with Abigel, who refuses to return to her own family as she tastes this fruit of promiscuity. It was imperative to free Abigel from sustaining the posture of an apostle of Dabra's promiscuity: "In no time at all Abigel had merged with the anonymous hordes, the hundreds of thousands of women who have left their husbands…(Ekwensi 2007, 158). Thus, this represents another kind of divorcement, analogous indeed to cases of *Abiku* children who at the point of their death, are said to prefer the 'other' world – the spirit world from where the soul is believed to have

migrated.

Just as the *Abiku/Ogbanje* child is known to be enchantingly accepted within their families of birth, Ekwensi's protagonist Filia Enu obtains such posture. After a period of her sojourn in Lagos, it seemed that Filia was to be overwhelmed in a flagrant embrace of the same kind of city life into which Jagua Nana and her daughters whom Nwahunanya regarded, were inundated. But then, Filia proves to be different from Nwahunanya's observation about women, "who choose prostitution consciously to meet family obligations... to fend for themselves and their families"(Ekwensi 2007, 347). Even in her own depravity, Abigel Salifas is not exactly placed in such ignoble image of the 'sex worker'.

Rather, it seems that the author permits Filia to blossom in her beauty, as a model, loved and cherished by all who are acquainted with her, so that the sorrows at her death become more emotive. Her character recalls the line in Soyinka's poem 'Abiku': "The ripest fruit was saddest" (190). Just before Filia's death, Dapo Ladele and Nafotim demonstrate how much her beauty needed to be acclaimed. Dapo's grief is captured thus: "He moaned and groaned and was no longer man enough to take it. He thought of all the unfulfilled promises her life held out and he wanted to kill himself (Ekwensi 2007, 216).That Filia, bearing the *Abiku* 'soul', eventually dies after growing up into maturity, may also be made to suggest that the spirit of death, that could terminate the existence of a human being or a nation, may indeed be more endur-

ing than it is supposed to be.

Conclusion

This work has examined how Ekwensi characterizes the nationhood of Nigeria in the likeness of the *Abiku*-child. With the socio-political upheavals in Nigeria, portrayed in the evil machinations of the *Abiku* spirit, it is considered as an ironical figuration of hypallage. It is one in which the disunited Nigeria becomes as formless as the invisible spirit world. Also, the agents of death represent the *Abiku* 'spirit' operating in the provinces chosen as the Iska locale. With the said substitution, Filia's husband Dan Kaybi and her father Uzodike Enu, are invested with peculiarly beautiful character. It figures the physical Abiku appearance for which the parents and relatives of the *Abiku*-child continue to make sacrifices to ensure it does not die even in spite of recognizing the evil 'soul' it bears. That the death of Uzodike and Dan Kaybi happen early in the novel and that of Filia occurs later, is most crucial in the symbolism that the author employs. Not only does he portray death as the agent that divorces the 'soul' from the 'body', his narrative substantiates the incongruity of touted national unity and the lack of an enabling environment for sustained nationhood. The impossibility of remediating the relationship between Dapo and his estranged wife, Barbara is cast thus: "It would never work. Both of them were too temperamentally unsuited to each other to make a success of it"(Ekwensi 2007, 221).

As it occurs in the novel, the several unsuited temperaments indict the structuring of the socio-political system in Nigeria's postcolony. These result from the reverse patriotism/statesmanship of the political class who happen to patronize the kind of rascality that thrives in a nation where the security system is either deliberately rendered non-functional or compelled to malfunction. In *Iska*, the often shift in the narrative perspective to the first person point of view, tilting more to a monologue than a dialogue, explains how Ekwensi purposefully harmonizes the spirit-to-human communication in the revelations that effuse. Dapo's monologue closes the narrative thus: "…thinking of Filia Enu, her plight, his total personal loss in every direction… and bound up with it all was his love for Nigeria, his belief in Africa, his frustration with the endless dissipation all about him of useful energy, talent and human power" (Ekwensi 2007, 222). Indeed, Dapo's reference to Filia's 'plight' implicates the *Abiku* 'soul' which is pertinently made to symbolize the ailing nationhood of Nigeria.

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Toni Morrison, "Whiteness" and the New History of Race in America: A Critical Overview

Ayan Mondal

Toni Morrison's contribution to the paradigm of black-aesthetics and literary criticism is as rich as her fictional oeuvre. She is hailed as one of the pioneers who heralded the discourse of "Whiteness" in literary studies in the 1990s offering fresh strategies for the reading of American canon. "In "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature" and *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, notes Hanna Wallinger, 'Toni Morrison contributes significantly to the debate about the canon of Ameri-

can literature in general and, in particular, it's underlying discourse of what she calls the "dark, abiding, signing Africanist presence'" (Wallinger 2007, 115). Morrison's "Unspeakable Things Unspoken", published in 1989 in the *Michigan Quarterly Review* was originally delivered as the "Hector Tanner Lecture on Human Values" at the University of Michigan on October 7, 1988 at the wake of her reception of the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the Robert F. Kennedy Award for her masterpiece *Beloved*. Her lecture seems to be prompted by the culture-Wars regarding the inclusion of works by the ethnic minorities in the American canon. With the boom of multiculturalism in America since the 1960s and the strong insistence of "Afrocentrism", to elevate the "racial" and the " ethnic" above the "universal" and "national", Morrison's enquiries and formulations generated fresh ideas and new dimensions in American literary criticism. Before turning to an exploration of these critical enquiries, it would be relevant to study the background against which Morrison was expressing her concerns – the culture Wars in America.

In his "Introduction" to his edited book *Loose Canons: Notes on the Culture War,* Henry Louis Gates Jr writes:

> The conservative desire has been to cast the debate in terms of the West versus the Rest. And yet that's the very opposition that the pluralist wants to challenge. Pluralism sees culture as porous, dynamic, and

> interactive, rather than as the fixed property of particular ethnic groups. Thus the idea of a monolithic, homogeneous "West" itself comes into question (nothing new here: literary historians have pointed out that the very concept of "Western culture" may date back only to the eighteenth century). But rather than mourning the loss of some putative ancestral purity, we can recognize what's valuable, resilient, even cohesive in the hybrid and variegated nature of modernity. (Gates Jr 1993, xvi).

Gates clearly argues that mere insistence on some "monochrome homogeneity" of culture disrupts the multicultural ambience of America. He points out that though vulgar cultural purists and nationalists like Leonard Jeffries and Allan Bloom had thrived on the absolutist black/white binary declaring themselves as enemies of pluralism, the American world is "multicultural already". Exemplifying America's inherent celebration of cultural diversity, Gates contends that musicians like Miles Davis, John Colltrane and Duke Ellington impacted world music; Wynton Marsalis took equal delight in jazz as with Mozart, Judith Jameson and Alvin Ailey blended Western dance forms with Afro-American indigenous modes of dancing; Romeare Bearden and Jacob Lawrence were adept in their study of Western artists and yet could masterfully pioneer Afro-American visual art. To highlight the multicultural essence in black literature Gates further stated:

> And in literature, of course, the most formally complex and compelling black writers —such as Jean Toomer, Sterling Brown, Langston Hughes, Zora Hurston, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, and Gwendolyn Brooks —have always blended forms of Western literature with African-American vernacular and written traditions… Morrison's master's thesis was on Virginia Woolf and Faulkner; Rita Dove is as conversant with German literature as she is with that of her own country. African-American culture, then, has been a model of multiculturalism and plurality. And it is this cultural impulse, I believe, that represents the very best hope for us, collectively, to forge a new, and vital, common American culture in the twenty-first century. (Gates 1993, xvii)

Countering the 'conservative penchant of charging multiculturalism with "politics"' (Gates 1993, xiv), he brings in his defence Cardinal Newman who held that the university should compulsorily promote "the power of viewing many things at once as one whole, referring them severally to their true place in the universal system, of understanding their respective values, and determining their mutual dependence" (qtd. in Gates 1993, xv). He also cited Edward Said who opined –

> Our model for academic freedom should therefore be the migrant or traveler: for if, in the real world outside the academy, we must needs be ourselves and only ourselves, inside the academy we should be

> able to discover and travel among other selves, other identities, other varieties of the human adventure. But most essentially, in this joint discovery of self and other, it is the role of the academy to transform what might be conflict, or context, or assertion into reconciliation, mutuality, recognition, creative interaction" (qtd in Gates 1993, xv).

Writing at a time when the Culture Wars impacted the US academia considerably, Morrison's critical standpoint in "Unspeakable Things Unspoken" is at once compelling and provocative. Her viewpoints in the essay should not be read merely as an apology for Afro-American literature to find room in the university curriculum. That would just have been another voice that concurred with the plea of the multiculturalists like Henry Louis Gates Jr. Morrison rather provides a theoretical framework to study canonical American texts in a new vein and to trace the symbiotic relationship of the governing themes of those literary masterpieces to the ideas entering the Afro-American population in the nation. Such an enquiry, therefore, unsettles the very idea that the American canon is distinctively "white".

In the tripartite structure of her essay "Unspeakable Things Unspoken", the very first section deals with the usual universalist ramifications sparked off by the rather nebulous label "American literature"— ideas concerning "value" and "quality", the propensity of neutralising racially inflected literature as "race-free" and also her

arguments regarding enhancing and expanding critical readings of the American canon rather than blindly enshrining the canonical writers. Referring to critics and scholars like Ivan Van Sertimer, Edward Said and Martin Bernal, Morrison also tries to re-contextualize her readings of the American canon in terms of the role played by the invisible, yet indelible presence of the dark and abiding Afro-Americanism within the structural contours of texts authored by whites and always regarded to address "humanistic" and "universal" themes. It is pertinent now, to address these issues comprehensively.

Pointing at the isolation of literature labelled as "American" from "other" literatures, Morrison writes:

> There is something called American literature that, according to conventional wisdom, is certainly not Chicano literature, or Afro-American literature, or Asian- American or Native- American, or…It is somehow separate from them and they from it, and in spite of the efforts of recent literary histories, re-structured curricula, and anthologies, this separate confinement be it breached or endorsed is the subject of a large part of these debates. ("Unspeakable Things Unspoken" [hereafter "UTU"] 1989, 124)

Morrison underlines how "American literature" became ideologically synonymous with "White American literature" in common critical parlance, and the term "white"

too race-neutral and obvious to be mentioned and marked. The necessity to attach prefixes like "African", "Chicano", "Asian" or "Native" to American literature bespeaks their "otherness" and the exclusivist impulse during the American culture-wars, which separated them from the American canon. Her project stemmed from her urge to parenthesise the words "white" and "race"—uncovering the pale of "racelessness" that was invested in the category called "white"- giving them access in "serious discussion of literature" (Morrison 1989,124). She makes her stance explicit stating that "quality" and "value" accorded to works of art are always relative and independent of "timeless" and "universal" paradigms constructed by the West. Citing her personal appreciation of Greek tragedy because of its "similarity to Afro-American communal structures and African religion and philosophy" (Morrison 1989, 125), she inferred that the same genre can hardly be a source of pleasure for those who do not feel at home with it. Therefore, one's appreciation or dislike of Greek tragedy hardly correspond to the "civilization that is its referent as flawless or superior to all others" (Morrison 1989, 125). Therefore, Western civilization generally and Western canon specifically need to be analysed and rethought of, by unmasking the veneer of neutrality and laying bare the crucial roles played by "race" even in texts that claim to be least bothered about it. Morrison points out unequivocally:

> For three hundred years black Americans insisted that "race" was no usefully distinguishing factor in human relationships. During these same three centuries every academic discipline, including theology, history, and natural science, insisted "race" was the determining factor in human development. When blacks discovered they had shaped or become a culturally formed race, and that it had specific and revered difference, suddenly they were told there is no such thing as "race"- biological or cultural, that matters and that genuinely intellectual exchange cannot accommodate it…It always seemed to me that the people who invented the hierarchy of "race" when it was convenient for them ought not to explain it away, now that it does not suit their purposes for it to exist. (Morrison "UTU" 1989, 126)

Morrison therefore wanted to find a distinctive space for "Afro-American literature" to rejuvenate and resuscitate literary studies in the United States while contextualizing the "routes canon debates have taken in Western literary criticism" (Morrison 1989, 126). In drawing that trajectory, she pointed out that displacements within the canon or rather the expansion of the canon is inevitable — "Certainly a sharp alertness as to *why* a work is not worthy of study is the legitimate occupation of the critic, the pedagogue, and the artist" (Morrison 1989, 128). She repudiates not the resistance, but "the virulent passion that accompanies this resistance and, more importantly, the quality of its defence weaponry" (Morri-

son 1989, 128). Such "defence", she concedes, is suicidal because it inevitably ends up paralysing and sometimes disfiguring and sacrificing the sacred texts. Morrison writes— "The canon fodder may kill the canon. And I, at least do not intend to live without Aeschylus or William Shakespeare, or James or Twain or Hawthorne, or Melville, and so on. There must be some way to enhance canon readings without enshrining them" (Morrison 1989, 128). The suicidal "defence weaponry" that Morrison was suggesting was the critical drive to insulate the American canon from discussions of race by mantling it with a protective garb of aesthetic superiority. What followed was the concomitant urge to resist the blatantly articulate black literatures, rooted in the dismal histories and the indigenous ethos of the Afro-Americans, from entering the precincts of the canon. Morrison cites in this context Terrence Rafferty's observations regarding Milan Kundera' s exclusion of American fiction-writers from his personal idea of novel. Kundera in *The Art of the Novel*, Rafferty observed, 'gives off the occasional whiff of cultural arrogance' (qtd in Morrison 1989, 128) by excluding from the "transcendent idea of the novel", heroes from the culture of the New World. While agreeing to Rafferty's observation of Kundera's Eurocentric bias in theorising the art of fiction, Morrison equally feels amazed and refreshed at the comments of Rafferty. She was amazed to note a parallelism of Kundera's critical position regarding European fiction as aesthetically superior, with the American critics' ostracisation of

Afro-American writers in the margins of creative and critical discourse. She notes:

> With the substitution of certain phrases, his (Rafferty's) observations and the justifiable umbrage he takes can be appropriated entirely by Afro-American writers regarding their own exclusion from the "transcendent idea of the novel". For the present turbulence seems not to be about the flexibility of a canon, its range among and between Western countries, but about its miscegenation. The word is informative here and I do mean its use. A powerful ingredient in this debate concerns the incursion of third-world or so-called minority literature into a Eurocentric stronghold. (Morrison 1989, 129)

She forwards specific ways by which such an incursion was resisted from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. The overpowering assumptions that marched across centuries were as follows: (1) Afro-American art, or for that matter minority art doesn't exist at all. Afro-Americans are "artless"; (2) Afro-American aesthetic standards, even if the art exists, are much inferior compared to the standards of their white counterparts; (3) Afro-American art can claim superiority only when it matches up to the "universal" criteria of Western art; (4) Afro-American art is like unrefined raw ore, that is in dire need of refinement by a Western or Eurocentric smith.

Morrison historicises her contemporary situation by narrating the received history of Greece, after Martin Bernal. She observed how Bernal pointed out the strategies of silencing many histories and socio-cultural discourses in favour of Egyptian roots of Greece, only to "fabricate" and establish its Aryan or European lineage. The following excerpt from Bernal's Black Athena succinctly sums up the reasons behind such fabrication:

> The Ancient Model had no major "internal" deficiencies or weaknesses in explanatory power. It was overthrown for external reasons. For eighteenth and nineteenth century Romantics and racists it was simply intolerable for Greece, which was seen not merely as the epitome of Europe but also as its pure childhood, to have been the result of the mixture of Native Europeans and colonizing Africans and Semites. Therefore the Ancient model had to be overthrown and replaced by something more acceptable. (qtd in Morrison 1989, 131)

In a way, therefore, the structuring of Greek history was necessitated by the demands of establishing its European roots. Similarly, Morrison argues that the silencing of Afro-American voices was conducive to the vested interest of building the American canon as an apparatus to be controlled by the whites. "Canon building", Morrison argues has always been, "…empire building. Canon defence is a national defence" (Morrison 1989, 132). However, Morrison ends the first section of her essay

with the promising note that in her contemporary times, much research and analyses attempted to render "speakable" what was formerly occluded as "unspeakable". She presents the strong foothold that the Afro-Americans acquired through years of struggle:

> We are (now) the subjects of our own experience, and in no way coincidentally, in the experience of those with whom we have come in contact. We are not, in fact, other. We are choices. And to read imaginative literature by and about us is to choose to examine centers of the self and to have the opportunity to compare these centers with the "raceless" one with which we are, all of us, most familiar. (Morrison 1989, 133)

The second section of Morrison's essay successfully defends the charges labelled on Afro-American art throughout centuries, while the third section applies her critical formulations on her own fiction. In the second section of her essay, she urges the readers to consider three specific theoretical focuses, which she felt "require(d) wakefulness". First, she harped on a comprehensive and distinctive "theory" of literature that can truly accommodate the complex nuances of Afro-American history, culture and artistic strategies. Second, she called for a re-examination of the American canon (particularly the works of the founding nineteenth century texts of the American Renaissance) and to locate in them the veiled "Afro-American presences". Such serviceability of the

Afro-Americans, both to the writers and the white characters the text sheltered, has to be closely studied to understand how they address questions of identity and permit access to the realm of lawlessness and danger which would not have been possible through "white" bodies or agencies. What needed to be studied and researched, therefore, was "the ways in which the presence of Afro-Americans has shaped the choices, the language, the structure- the meaning of so much American literature. A search, in other words, for the ghost in the machine" (Morrison 1989, 136). Third, she talked about similar research on contemporary/non-canonical literature (both mainstream and minority) to study the 'resonances, the structural gearshifts, and the uses to which Afro-American narratives, persona, and idiom are put in contemporary "white" literature. And in Afro-American literature itself the questions of difference, of essence, are critical. What makes a work "black"?' (Morrison 1989, 136). The present dissertation, however, specifically intends to address the second focus of Morrison listed above and to examine the serviceability of not merely the black characters, but "blackness" as a trope in three nineteenth century canonical white American texts.

When Morrison almost looks subjectively at her own subject-position as a black woman and also as a writer well aware of the strategies of evasions, she sheds light on the creative impulse that results in such "absences" of Afro-Americans in white texts. "The spectacularly in-

teresting question is", she writes, "What intellectual feats had to be performed by the author or his critic to erase me from a society seething with my presence, and what effect has that performance had on the work?" What are the strategies of escape from knowledge?" (Morrison 1989, 136). In spite of gruelling turbulence in the contemporary nineteenth century society which was in the heights of slavery and abolitionism, the nineteenth century writers chose the imaginative "romances" and Morrison specifically enquires where in the romances lay the "shadow" from which the text had escaped or diverted, and which areas in the text needed novelistic inventions to ensure such a "release" and departure from the politics of the times. It was strikingly ironical that the New World which was trying to curve its own niche in the domain of fiction, had to subscribe to "the Eurocentric Western position in literature as not only "universal" but also race-free" (Morrison 1989, 138). Yet, the results of such a defence were to "lobotomize" literature making it narrow and myopic. Morrison compared such critical silences with the act of paralysing the work of art— "Like the surgical removal of legs so that the body can remain enthroned, immobile, static- under house arrest, so to speak" (Morrison 1989, 138). Writers of Young America, according to Morrison, could write freely without any subversive threat or inhibition of getting "written back", "talked back" or even "gazed at". Morrison contends humorously enough that Edgar Allan Poe could never have imagined "her" reading of his *The Gold Bug* dis-

torting the speech patterns of her black ancestors. The canon of American literature, according to Morrison had been made to appear "inevitably white". Therefore, Morrison was not merely arguing in favour of the inclusion of Afro-American literature in the canon (which to a large extent had been achieved, by the time she was penning her essay), but rather a re-examination of the ostensibly white canon to locate fissures and crevices there that might upset its "purity". She blames the critical discourses that had always attempted to safeguard such purity:

> Perhaps some of these writers (of Young America) although under current house arrest, have much more to say than has been realized. Perhaps some were not so much transcending politics, or escaping blackness, as they were transforming it into intelligible, accessible, yet artistic modes of discourse. (Morrison 1989, 139)

The act of "lobotomizing" literature, the very act of remaining blind to the strategies of transformation the writers took recourse to, to evade blackness, was, according to Morrison "an exorbitant price for cultural (white-male) purity" and therefore what was imperative was the "re-examination of founding literature of the United States for the unspeakable things unspoken (that) may reveal those texts to have deeper and other meanings, deeper and other power, deeper and other significances" (Morrison 1989, 139-140).

Morrison's critical work *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992) is a more comprehensive theorization of the idea of "whiteness" as a construct and has metamorphosed the entire approach of reading and analysis of canonical American texts which the erstwhile critical discourses tried to homogenize as distinctively "American". Such discourses have insulated the classic texts authored by whites as texts independent in their own right uninformed and unshaped by the four-hundred years old presence of the black population in the American soil. Morrison in the second and third chapters of her book "Romancing the Shadow" and "the Kindness of Sharks" provides certain clues that may subvert one's understanding of some "canonical" white texts after formulating a novel theoretical discourse on the ideas of "whiteness" and "Africanism" in her introductory chapter "Black Matters". It is relevant at the present juncture to shed light on Morrison's theoretical insights presented in this book.

Morrison begins with the claim that her study intends to *extend* the scope of American literature and re-situate the entire corpus in a much wider critical landscape. She asserts that her project stems from her desire of reviewing the texts as well as the textual criticisms, and to point out those aspects of the texts on which there have been critical silences. An urge to explore such strategic silences in American texts in matters of race, Morrison believed, became possible not only because of her "readerly" subject position, but the "writerly" one:

> As a reader (before becoming a writer) I read as I had been taught to do. But books revealed themselves differently to me as a writer. In that capacity I have to place enormous trust in my ability to imagine others and my willingness to project consciously into the danger zones such others may represent for me. (Morrison 1992, 3)

Morrison points out further that despite the pervasive influence of the African-Americans in the United States behind shaping the Constitution, culture and the national literature of America, historians and critics have ignored their influence altogether. Specifically in respect of literature they champion the all-enveloping homogenous grand-narrative of a particular "Americanness" which the white male perspective has always insulated and safeguarded from any relationship with "the overwhelming presence of black people in the United States. Morrison, therefore, tries to uncover the ideas that lie concealed in the White American consciousness and strongly holds that what needs to be focused upon is a comprehensive understanding of this black presence. She claims that the "contemplation of this black presence is central to any understanding of the American national literature and should not be permitted to hover at the margins of the literary imagination" (Morrison 1992, 5). Addressing this fabricated "Africanist presence" as "American Africanism", Morrison notes that the construction of "Africanism" as an ideological category was executed not merely by the US, but by the cultures of other nations

like England, France, Germany, Spain. Differing from the philosophical ideas that might signify the term Africanism, Morrison records:

> I am using the term "Africanism" not to suggest the larger body of knowledge on Africa that the philosopher Valentine Mudimbe means by the term "Africanism", nor to suggest the varieties and complexities of African people and their descendants who have inhabited this country. Rather I use it as a term for the denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings and misreading that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people (Morrison 1992, 6-7).

Morrison, however, was far from suggesting a counter-hegemonic black perspective by what she calls "exchange of dominations" (Morrison 1992, 8) and replacing the Eurocentric scholarship with another dominant Afro-centric scholarship. She was interested in the ways by which literary imagination "plays" and how often literary criticism robs literature of either its overt or covert ideological mechanisms. She was suggesting a close scrutiny of literary "blackness", not for its own sake but for deciphering the concomitant cause of literary "whiteness". She was surprised at the diverse ways in which "race" is either ignored as a graceful, generous and liberal gesture by scholars or has specifically been focused on the racial object rather than the subject. Morrison notes:

> It seems both poignant and striking how avoided and unanalysed is the effect of racist inflection on the subject. What I propose here is to examine the impact of notions of racial hierarchy, racial exclusion, and racial vulnerability and availability on nonblacks who held, resisted, explored or altered these notions. The scholarship that looks into the mind, imagination and behaviour of slaves is valuable. But equally valuable is a serious intellectual effort to see what racial ideology does to the mind, imagination and behaviour of masters. (Morrison 1992, 12)

Morrison notes that such shift of focus from the "black" object to the "white" subject "may provide access to a deeper reading of American literature- a reading not completely available, now, at least, I suspect, because of the studied indifference of most literary criticism to these matters" (Morrison 1992, 9).

Referring to the practice of some avid, but radically non-academic readers as well as some powerful literary critics who habitually exclude African-American texts from their reading list, Morrison notes that such ignorance about the black culture, sentiments and ethos would hardly restrict themselves from becoming writers and critics of repute in the United States. What was more alarming to Morrison, was the blindness of such literary critics to the ways in which the "black surrogacy" (Morrison 1992, 13) has informed, shaped and stabilized

the literature they do read. Morrison expresses her disillusionment at the customary trait of most literally critics of camouflaging this black presence, as her lasting resort in the writers. She states:

> Writers are among the most sensitive, the most intellectually anarchic, most representative, most probing of artists. The ability of writers to imagine what is not the self, to familiarize the strange and mystify the familiar, is the test of their power. The languages they use and the social and historical context in which these languages signify are indirect and direct revelations of that power and its limitations. So it is to them, the creators of American literature, that I look for clarification about the invention and effect of Africanism in the United States (Morrison 1992, 15).

She scaffolds her thesis by referring to traditional criticisms of Henry James's *What Massie Knew,* Gertrude Stein's *Three Lives*, Willa Cather's *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* and novels by Hemingway and Flannery O'Connor which have very safely and tactfully evaded either perspectives on black representation or how the black agency could articulate the universal themes of their novels. She, from her subject position as a writer herself, looked into the ways in which their imaginative process work to conceptualize what is "not the self, to familiarize the strange and mystify the familiar" (Morrison 1992, 15). In the Chapter "Romancing the Shadow" she fur-

ther historicizes the ways by which American literature came to crafted by the young nation not only with the drive of an imaginative flight from the repressions of the Old world and the possibilities of freedom in the New World. The New World attracted new immigrants in myriad ways and the new setting welcomed them with the vision of a "limitless future, made more gleaming by the constraint, turmoil and dissatisfaction left behind" (Morrison 1992, 34). Morrison succinctly observes:

> There was very much more in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to make the trip worth the risk. The habit of genuflection would be replaced by the thrill of command. Power- control of one's destiny- would replace the powerlessness felt before the gates of class, caste and cunning persecution. One could move from discipline and punishment to disciplining and punishing; from social ostracism to social rank. One could be released from a useless binding, repulsive past into a kind of history-lessness, a blank page writing to be inscribed. Much was to be written there: noble impulses were made into law and appropriated for a national tradition; base ones learned and elaborated in the rejected and rejecting homeland, and also made into law and appropriated for tradition. (Morrison 1992, 35)

But, despite the promises and hopes the New World generated (Truslow coined it as the "American Dream"), the founding literature of young America was replete

with transactions with different, fears, anxieties, tensions, repressions and inhibitions and such experiences were variously labelled as "gothic", "sermonic", "romantic", "Puritan" etc. Paradoxically enough, the European disorder and anarchy which the young country wished to leave behind began to be projected in the literature of the new nation. In the nineteenth century, the literary form which could accommodate the "uniquely American prophylaxis" (Morrison 1992, 36) was "romance". This new genre began to embrace the fears of the new nation— "Americans' fear of being outcast, of failing, of powerlessness: their fear of boundarylessness, of Nature unbridled and crouched for attack; their fear of the absence of so-called civilization: their fear of loneliness, of aggression both external and internal" (Morrison 1992, 37). Morrison critiques the usual critical conjecture that romances are ahistorical and atemporal, with her unequivocal contention— 'There is no romance free of what Herman Melville called "the power of blackness", especially not in a country in which there was a resident population already black, upon which the imagination could play;' (Morrison 1992, 37). The creative possibilities of the country began to get enriched by the presence of the black population, the fabrication of an American Africanism, which Morrison intended to probe deep into. Such a fabrication was essential to craft the fresh American identity as the "new white man" and writers did not craft this distinctive American identity merely by establishing difference with the European cul-

tural and aesthetic standards, but by maintaining a racial difference. Citing the example of William Dunbar about whom Bernard Bailyn had written in his *Voyagers to the West*, Morrison pointed out that the new white man was conditioned by a "sense of authority and autonomy he had not known before, a force that flowed from his absolute control over the lives of others" and functioned as a "bordered gentleman, a man of property in a raw, half-savage world" (Morrison 1992, 42). Like Dunbar's experience, concerns over authority, autonomy, newness, difference and power turned out to be the governing themes of American literature and all white men tried to posit their privileged subject-positions against the "bound and unfree, rebellious but serviceable black population" (Morrison 1992, 45). Therefore, Morrison argued, statements regarding the supposed racelessness of the very American identity and the founding texts that projected such identity, made by strong assertions, are false. She contends:

> Statements…insisting on the meaninglessness of race to the American identity, are themselves full of meaning. The world does not become raceless or will not become unracialized by assertion. The act of enforcing racelessness in literary discourse is itself a racial act. Pouring rhetorical acid on the fingers of a black hand may indeed destroy the prints but not the hand. Besides, what happens to that violent self-serving act of erasure to the hands, the fingers or the finger-prints of the one who does the pouring? Do

> they remain acid free? The literature itself suggests otherwise. (Morrison 1992, 46)

Therefore, what needed compelling study were the inescapable ways in which the very texture of American literature was impacted by the "dark and abiding" Africanist presence in order to unmark and render visible American "whiteness". The founding nineteenth century texts, sometimes were not about Africanist presences or even black characters and could still address such presences as shadows hovering "in implication, in sign, in line of demarcation" (Morrison 1992, 47). Even when the literary works "spoke for Africans and their descendants, or of them" (Morrison 1992, 50), they turned out to be "master-narratives" and hardly ran the risk of getting written back— "The legislator's narrative could not coexist with a response from the Africanist persona" (Morrison 1992, 50). Morrison proposes in the book four distinctive topics for critical investigation. They are:

(1) the role of the Africanist character(s) as surrogates to regulate the white writerly imagination— "Africanism is the vehicle by which the American self knows itself as powerful; not history-less, but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution, but a progressive fulfilment of destiny" (Morrison 1992, 52).

(2) the ways in which Africanist idiom/language/dialect is often employed to highlight difference, "how the dialogue of the black characters is construed as an alien,

estranging dialect made deliberately unintelligible by spellings contrived to defamiliarize it; how it is used to establish a cognitive world split between speech and text, to reinforce class distinction and otherness as well as to assert privilege and power" (Morrison 1992, 52), and by encoding in that language aberrant ideas of "illegal sexuality, fear of madness, expulsion, self-loathing"(Morrison 1992, 52)

(3) the specific purposes to enhance and project the ramifications of the ideology of whiteness through an Africanist character and the ways in which the "other" is used as an agency to "ease and order external and internal chaos" (Morrison 1992, 53) of the self and to "explore and penetrate one's own body in the guise of the sexuality, vulnerability and anarchy" (Morrison 1992, 53) of the other.

(4) analysis of Africanist narratives "represented" within a "master-narrative" as having the ulterior purpose of projecting a "discourse on ethics, social and universal codes of behaviour, …assertions about and definitions of civilization and reason" and how such a narrative is deployed in the "construction of a history and a context for whites by positing history-lessness and context-lessness for blacks" (Morrison 1992, 53).

To "render the nation's literature a much more complex and rewarding body of knowledge" (Morrison 1992, 53), therefore, Morrison suggested the new reading

strategies in the third chapter of their book, "Disturbing Nurses and the Kindness of Sharks". Following James Snead's observations regarding Faulkner's literary devices, Morrison also listed some of the prevalent linguistic strategies that fiction employs by way of engaging with the blacks and "blackness". First, by economising stereotype which relieves the writer from the burden of accurately portraying blacks with all their specificities; second, by "metonymic displacement" which vaguely relies on received ides of colour coding, displacing, rather than signifying the Africanist character; third by "metaphysical condensation" which ahistoricizes social and historical differences between races making them appear "universal"; fourth by "fetishization" which projects erotic fears, inhibitions and desires on the "other", establishing gross differences where difference is in fact negligible; fifth by "dehistoricizing allegory" where the very process of "civilizing" becomes indefinite and infinite; sixth, by employing disjointed, explosive and repetitive language and justifying the same by attributing it to the "black" narratives and objects over which the author/narrator hardly has any control.

Morrison's book seems to have been considerably influenced by Edward Said's *Orientalism*, particularly his elaborations regarding the very representation of the "Orient". The following passage from Said well illustrates the point:

> The value, efficacy, strength, apparent veracity of a written statement about the Orient therefore relies very little…on the Orient as such. On the contrary, the written statement is a presence to the reader by virtue of its having excluded, displaced, made supererogatory any such real thing as "the Orient"…that Orientalism makes sense at all depends more on the West than on the Orient, and this sense is directly indebted to various Western techniques of representation that make the Orient visible, clear, "there" in discourse about it. And these representations rely upon institutions, traditions, conventions, agreed-upon codes of understanding for their effects, not upon a distant and amorphous Orient. (Said 1995, 21-22)

The idea of Europe's dependence on the fabricated and displaced orient to define itself and the ways by which "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and underground self" (Morrison 1992 3) parallel Morrison's thesis in *Playing in the Dark*. Morrison's account of the serviceability and the agency of the Africanist presence offering a playground for the "white" imagination by way of setting itself off against blackness, very clearly reflects the Saidian undertone. Again, philosophically speaking, there are clear undertones of the Hegelian dialectic of master-slave relationship in Morrison's theoretical account. Hegel in the "Self-Consciousness" section of his book *The Phenomenology of Spirit* points at the crucial turn in history when the unidimensionally

perceived power-relation between the master's autonomy and the slave's thraldom gets subverted and the slave embraces an "independent self-consciousness" to challenge and unsettle the authority of the master. In other words, through the initial stage in history where the slave has to depend on the master, a time comes when the entire process gets inverted as the slave comes to realise the master's vulnerability and dependence on the slave. The following passage from Hegel is worth quoting in this context:

> For self-consciousness there is another self-consciousness; self-consciousness is *outside of itself*. This has a two-fold meaning. First, it has lost itself, for it is to be found as an *other* essence. Second, it has thereby sublated that other, for it also does not see the other as the essence but rather sees itself in the other. (Hegel 1998, 161)

The Hegelian dialectic that substantiates the master's constitutive dependence on the slave can be related to Morrison's "Africanist presence" that becomes the essential factor in articulating the universalist ramifications of the American canon. The very act of hegemonically preserving the sanctity of "whiteness" / "Americanness" of the white canon therefore becomes redundant. If Americanness is all about freedom, individualism, happiness, prosperity, dreams and enlightenment, all these facets required realisation by means of the bond-

age, servitude, sufferings, and the "dark, abiding, signing" presence of the Afro-Americans.

Morrison's discourse on the canon can also be studied as a reaction to Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr's book *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (1991) which was a blatant attack on the fallacies of multiculturalism and Afrocentrism. Even after acknowledging that diversity had been the essence of the American nation since its inception, he focused on a common national identity, "the American creed", invested with the power of holding the pluralities together. Schlesinger considered "multiculturalism" as a threat to the "apparatus" controlling schools, universities and also the economy of the nation. He thought of the Afrocentrists to be more pernicious than the other separatist groups, in that, those groups never tried to superimpose their ethnocentric mythologies on the curriculum of public schools, which the Afrocentrists were desperate to address. The drive of the Afrocentrists to focus Africa as the centre of the achievements of the world, Schlesinger believed, was a serious threat to academic excellence or self-esteem which are independent of "racial pride". In the "Introduction" to his book Schlesinger writes: "The ethnic upsurge (it can hardly be called a revival because it was unprecedented) began as a gesture of protest against the Anglocentric culture. It became a cult, and today it threatens to become a counter-revolution against the original theory of America as "one people",

a common culture, a single nation" (Schlesinger 1998 "Kindle Edition"). Schlesinger's conceptualization of the "original theory" of America as a pot that melts diversities, is arguably, the distinctive point of Morrison's attack in *Playing in the Dark*. It must be noted, however, that Morrison was, in a way, trying to speak about the unspeakable in the line of Michael Novak's *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics*. Novak opined, "Growing up in America has been an assault upon my sense of worthiness…the new ethnic politics…asserts that groups can structure the rules and goals and procedures of American life" (qtd. in Schlesinger 1998, 47). But, whereas, Novak's interest was to show the role of ethnicity and the strong impact it left on American life in general, Morrison's enquiry from a strictly literary perspective, was to dig out the role and serviceability of ethnicities in canonical American literature which the nation always championed as distinctively "white". Schlesinger's contention, that too much insistence on multicultural and racial ideologues can hamper the cohesive national spirit of America, comes under serious attack with Morrison's discourse that the American self was "always already" dependent on its "other".

Reviews of Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* are as worthy of critical attention as the text is. Craig Seligman, for example, contends that a "kind of backfire has happened in literature: that for all the majority's attempts to shut out the minority, the minority has returned, intransigent and accusatory, through the back door of the literary

subconscious" (Seligman 1993, 7). Pinson argues—"In recovering the inscribed characteristics of the ideal American male —intellectual boldness, pioneering sensibilities, and identification with the ideology of the Enlightenment —she(Morrison) foregrounds the contradictory sanguinity with which these same figures built the American Dream on the systematized degradation of enslaved Africans" (Pinson 1993, 88). Shelley Fisher Fishkin points out the originality of Morrison in her project. "Morrison's target of attack", she writes, " is not the obvious one of racist stereotypes and language, which others have tackled before her; rather, it is the tendency of critics to assume that race is irrelevant to much of American literature and to their enterprise as critics" (Fishkin 629). Trudier Harris opines, "While some scholars might be disturbed by the negligences Morrison claims, indeed discomforted by the lines of inquiry she offers, the volume cannot be dismissed; neither can Morrison's growing reputation as one of the more critically astute of contemporary American writers" (Harris 188).

Commemorating the 25th year of Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Joseph Darda in "A New White Man: Toni Morrison's Playing in the Dark turns 25", reads the reception of the text and the concomitant counter-texts and debates in the light of the recent election of Donald Trump as the US President. Darda writes:

> *Playing in the Dark* offers a reminder in the first year of the Trump administration that whiteness cannot be treated in isolation from other racial categories. Instead it must be recognized as something formed within a larger racial order. The Trump era has brought to the surface a new form of whiteness, in which white men are recentered on American culture through an alleged decentring, in which whiteness is reconceived as a minoritized culture besieged by immigration and globalization. (Darda 2017)

Darda, however pointed out that the new turn towards "Whiteness Studies" addressed concerns that tend to perceive "whiteness" as "a source of individual alienation rather than structural advantage" (Darda 2017). Such concerns were ventilated in books like Arlie Russell Hochschild's S*trangers in their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (2016) and J.D. Vance's *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of Family and Culture in Crisis* (2016). Darda records that the *National Review* hailed Vance as "the Trump whisperer". Vance's stance in the book was one of complete sympathy and allegiance with the white working class section of the nation. Vance opines— "I may be white, but I do not identify with the WASPs of the Northeast…Instead, I identify with the millions of working-class white Americans as minoriotized yet not racialized" (qtd in Darda, 2017). However, Darda also pointed out that Vance's stance is in itself a "racist" stance seen in the light of Morrison- "But racialization is, Morrison stresses, an uneven process that creates and

sustains social hierarchies rather than equivalent categories of difference. Being white and poor in the United States is not the same as being black and poor" (Darda 2017)

Therefore, after almost three decades of Morrison's publication of her thesis on "whiteness", it still remains relevant in the Post-Obama US still being haunted by the forces set in motion by "the brash Manhattan billionaire", Trump. Darda puts in his review:

> *Playing in the Dark* motivated a generation of ethnic studies scholars and students to make whiteness visible. It was critical, they argued, that we not let whiteness continue to go unacknowledged and unexamined as a social norm….From the beginning, critical whiteness studies has risked recentering whiteness in the act of indicting it. The critical and commercial success of books like Vance's memoir points to the limitations and pitfalls of making whiteness visible in the 21st century. The challenge for writers now will be making whiteness visible as part of a social structure that divests non-white Americans of resources and opportunities rather than as another minoritized cultural identity. It is a difficult thing to do because a social structure doesn't make a very compelling protagonist. Morrison's lectures recount her own recognition of that structure and how it organizes our literature and our lives. (Darda 2017)

Morrison's project thus needs to be expanded, analysed, critiqued and reconsidered even in the twenty-first century, to show how the present times continue what has always been the practice since the inception of nationhood in America.

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"Blacks are beautiful. And ugly too": Moving beyond the Racial barrier and foregrounding Resistance in Langston Hughes' poetry

Auritra Munshi

Introduction

Langston Hughes, one of the prominent Afro-American poets of the Harlem Renaissance, attempted to carve out a niche for the Blacks by providing them leeway to reveal themselves on their own without being interpellated into the colonial subject as cloaked in the white culture. Hughes, desiring to advocate the Black supremacy among the African American people living in the United States, underwent acrimonious circumstanc-

es. African Americans, for instance, who belonged to his own cultural community, nourished a pipe dream to be white. African Americans, thus, fall prey to this epistemological snare in which they were trapped more as a result of their history of slavery. In fact, White aesthetics was embedded in their sub-consciousness in such a manner that they could hardly avert it. It, consequently, created a racial mountain in which white remained at the apex–supremacy–and black occupied a lower position. Such social stratification tended to foreground an egalitarian society which was oppressive and ethnic exclusionary as well. Western thought has conceived the self or being as totalized and excludes others. Emmanuel Levinas condemns upon such western thought which yields importance to build up 'Being' or the 'Totality', and thus occludes the voices of the others. Hughes anticipated the voices of the blacks through his poetry in order to exonerate the blacks from the ideological repression of the West. Hughes, the representative of the Black community, tries to retain his ethical responsibility by reviving Afrocentricity among the black community through his poetic credo. In this paper, the basic thrust is to delve deep into his certain poems in order to reveal how determined he was to explore the black consciousness which was on the verge of extinction under the western eyes. Hughes' poetic description is replete not only with agony,frustration but also with the aspiration of refashioning a new world wherein a negro will no longer be treated as a mere object, and can bring out his

racial pride. Thus, it is indicative of the poet's longing for subjective visibility of the Blacks.

Socio-Political Background of the Blacks: A Journey from Slavery to Self-Awakening

The history of black people can be divided into two sections: the early phase refers to the Pre-civil war and the subsequent phase indicates the post-civil war period, which reveals the era of slavery. However, the post-civil war period is gradually replaced by the equally oppressive tropes like racism, which hollowed out the-*Vox populi*–general voice of the people, especially the Blacks. Black leaders are dedicated to fighting the White supremacist ideology in order to abolish such system that name a group as 'Negroes' until the early twentieth century. Later, the nomenclature evolved into such an appellation like 'coloured' people as opposed to 'white people'. However, Black Panther Party launched the Black power movement in the year 1950s and 60s with Martin Luther king Jr, on the other hand, initiated the successful non-violent campaign for Civil Rights Act of 1964. But it was the Black power movement, which emphasized upon the intense racial consciousness with the slogan "Black is Beautiful". In fact, the time span between 1920 and 1930 became the crucial period in the history of America, and especially for the blacks, because many African Americans migrated from southern region to the northern region of the United States, especially to New

York where Harlem was situated. As a matter of fact, Harlem became a place teeming with African American urban population, and the upsurge of the radical African American intellectuals resulted in the 'New Negro Consciousness' movement or the 'Harlem Renaissance' (1890-1920). Harlem modernism offered new literary voices and avenues for the blacks by privileging them with their own southern black vernacular, the rhythms of blues, jazz. Thus, the Harlem modernism, having its fervor of intense racial consciousness, spurned European cultural tropes, and thereby attempting to recuperate the souls of the black folks from the ideological repression of the white mythology. Langston Hughes, a famous African American poet of the Harlem Renaissance, raised his voice like other African American writers such as Claude McKay, Zora Neale Hurston, Nella Larsen, Jean Toomer and others regarding the collective black consciousness which was eclipsed by the European High Modernism. Hughes incorporated blues, spirituals, colloquial speech, and folkways in his poetry, and thus disseminated the intense racial consciousness, which was on the verge of extinction during that time. Although, it may be indicative of foregrounding the 'ghetto mentality', he feels a dire necessity to mobilize the oppressed Africans, thereby forging a racial mountain for the blacks from where they can anticipate their strategic positions by performing their own ethno-cultural slabs; it appears to be counter hegemonic and self-contemplative, too, in carving out one's own identity.

Conflicting Ideologies and Regeneration of the Blacks

Artistic explosion, which was the kernel of the Harlem Renaissance, came to the fore with various hues and contested ideologies prevalent in the black community. Cary Wintz in 'Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance' points out,

> It (Harlem) reflected the confusing and contradictory position of Blacks in the early twentieth century. It was a symbol of Black migrant who left the South and went to North with dreams, freedom and opportunity. It also symbolized the Shattered pieces of those dreams which lay half buried beneath the filth and garbage of the city slum. Harlem reflected the self-confidence, militancy and pride of the New Negro in his or her demand for equality; it reflected the aspirations and genius of the writers and poets of the Harlem Renaissance; but Harlem, like the Black migrant, like the New Negro, and like the Renaissance writers, did not resolve its problems or fulfill its dreams. (1988,14)

In fact, the problem lies in the formation of cultural identity. If social behavior is the ultimate determinant in the formation of cultural identity, exploitative environment as designed by the White cultures leads the ethnic group to be assimilated within the macro-culture. On the other hand, if heritage tampers with the cultural

identity, it precipitates the unipolar race bound cultural identity. However, such contested ideologies were borne out of the nature of black identity, place and the function of art. There were certain Blacks who were born in the United States, but were completely oblivious to their ancestral cultural moorings. They preferred to declare themselves Americans. It referred to the diasporic consciousness.

However, such diasporic consciousness creates a split personality, which refers to an ongoing conflict between Africa-centered and African-American ideals. It is related to the phenomenon which Du Bois has termed as 'double-consciousness'. Homi Bhabha also addresses such schism between the dual modes of national self-representation in "DissemiNation":

> In the production of the nation as narration, there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitions, recursive strategy of the performative. It is through this process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of writing the nation (2004,145-46).

In fact, such prevailing conflict between the performative and the pedagogical issues helps formulate the idea of Nation. African American population belongs to two different but overlapping communities of nation and

diaspora; it indicates the social and historical qualities of black life in the United States of America. However, being a descendant of African culture, one could resort to imagination to re-inscribe one's own ethnic enclave within the home country that consequently makes the cartographical border, which the United States encompasses, fuzzy. For the African Americans, Africa becomes, to put in the words of Avtar Brah, 'a mythic place of desire' (2005,192). The so-called American white mythology sucks the voices of such Africans in a way that they are following the assimilationist ideology. But the revival of black consciousness as a vital tool is taken up by some Black leaders and writers in order to reinforce the black consciousness within America, and thereby discarding the assimilationist ideology. However, such ideology of assimilation was initiated by Booker. T. Washington, the most popular black leader, who had a faith in black folks. To him, the assimilationist ideology argues for a Black folk culture similar to the White and identical in orientation with the whites that allows equal practical skills and competitiveness with the Whites in the economic sphere and conformity to the Christian morality.

When the White culture frittered away the voice of the blacks and represented them as jejune and subaltern, Booker-.T. Washington refuted the concept of otherness as attributed to, and imposed upon, the Blacks by the Whites. Indeed, he reinforced their sameness in his

ideology. This accomodationist/assimilationist ideology was challenged by Du Bois, who expressed his quest for racial solidarity and Black art. He raised his voice against disenfranchisement and segregation, and sought to win the struggle for civil rights. On the other hand, Marcus Garvey, the Jamaican leader, perpetuated Pan-Africanism without its former form of militancy. Rather, Garvey aimed to unite four millions Black people with a view to emancipate not only the African Americans but all the Africans who were incarcerated within the torpor as governed by the White Culture. His philosophy advocated the emergence of a Black consciousness that celebrated Black identity. He embarked upon the Black pride and power which had been manifested in the literature of the Harlem Renaissance. He emphasized upon African heritage and culture of the Black people, and thus revealed his essentialist approach to the cultural identity.

Afrocentricity, which was an important feature of the Harlem Renaissance, referred to the innate potential of the Blacks who could elevate their own positions by means of utilizing their own cultural tools, and thus sought to generate an enviable space for them; it was quite challenging to the European dominated thinking. Molefi Asanta has rightly pointed out, "Without Afrocenticity, African-Americans would not have a voice to add to multiculturalism" (1987,21). In fact, African Americans generated a distinct culture in the United States, depending upon their African heritage – an Afro-American perspective helped recognize and under-

stand that culture from the inside out, rather than from the outside in. Thus, it brought out a tradition in African American letters that drove Black literature to go beyond the protest writing, and thereby enabled them to edge out the White cultural monopoly. Proper realization of Afrocentricity was, in fact, a quintessential problem faced by the Black artists in the Harlem Renaissance. It provoked generating an intellectual debate within the Harlem Renaissance: proper cultural expression vis-a-vis authentic cultural expression. In the 1990s, Afrocentricity would realize the Afro-American culture from the inside out. But in the 1920s, it was a luxury that the Black artists and men of letters found very difficult to afford. Du Bois argues that:

> … the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil and gifted with second-sight in this American world – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the eyes of others of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideas in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of his strife – his longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging, he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. (1988,3)

Thus, such Black thinkers spoke of the regeneration of the Blacks in the United States and so they were in an attempt to establish their sole existence. Many Black artists instilled a wee bit of artistic energy into the creation of their cultural identity. To this end Richard Wright states:

> Generally speaking Negro writing in the past has been confined to humble novels, poems and plays, prim and decorous ambassadors who went a-begging to White America. They entered the court of American public opinion dressed in the knee-pants of servility, curtsying to show that the Negro was not inferior, that he was human, and that he had a life comparable to that of other people. For the most part these artistic ambassadors were received as though they were French poodles who do never tricks. (1997,403)

It directly tended to formulate a ghetto culture in the United States in which Africans sought to engage themselves in performing their own ethno-cultural slabs. Afro-American diasporic consciousness was thus tied to their past memories, which were associated with Africa. Hence, they reincarnated their home culture in the host culture; and it is akin to Willaim Safran's concept of diasporic subjectivity formation. Safran proclaims,

> Diasporic community includes several categories of individuals (refugees, expatriates, alien, residents, ethnic and racial minorities) living outside their home-

> land and sharing a sense of common features, such as a history of dispersal, visions and memories of lost homeland, alienation in the host land, yearning for an eternal return and collective identity. (1991,83)

However, Langston Hughes as a prominent Afro-American poet of the Harlem Renaissance attempted to carve a new path of identity supremacy for the Blacks by providing new aesthetics that anticipated African heritage without being interpellated into the colonial subject as cloaked in the white culture.

Langston Hughes' Poetry: A Representation of Afrocentricity and New Negro Consciousness

Hughes, who preached the Black supremacy among the African American people living in the United States, underwent difficult circumstances. To the African American in his community, the ideal personality is the white supremacy which is their dream to become. But the white aesthetic is a lure into an ideological repression, which consequently, has resulted in a racial mountain in which Blacks were placed in the lowest rung of the societal ladder. Such social polarization forged an oppressive mechanism which was ethnic exclusionary. Western thought has conceived the self or being as totalized and excludes others. Emmanuel Levinas condemns such western thought which yields importance to conceive 'Being' or the 'Totality', and thus occludes the voices of

the others. Levinas believes in the freedom which refers to "the mode of remaining the same in the midst of the other(s)" (Levinas1969,45). He feels that such totality, which is emblematic of Western self, has entered into the tyranny of the state which refuses the existence of the others. He conceptualized the notion of the others as infinite. Others, indeed, acknowledge the idea of infinity, an excess, transcendence or alterity which undermines the significance of the totality.

Hughes ostensibly perpetuated the same tune which resonated with the recuperation of Black consciousness from the metanarrative of the White mythology. In his essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (1926), he vituperated the condition of the African American people who were inspired by the Whites and wanted to be white. Hughes reflected such mentality of his own community with utmost grief in this essay:

> One of the most promising of the young Negro poets said to me once, I want to be a poet—not a Negro poet,' meaning, I believe, I want to write like a white poet; meaning subconsciously, I would like to be a white poet'; meaning behind that, I would like to be white.' And I was sorry the young man said that, for no great poet has ever been afraid of being himself. And I doubted then that, with his desire to run away spiritually from his race, this boy would ever be a great poet. But this is the mountain standing in the way of any true Negro art in America--this urge

> within the race toward whiteness, the desire to pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization, and to be as little Negro and as much American as possible (1926,1).

To Be White or Not To Be: Conflicting Emotions in Hughes' Quest for Black Racial Mountain

At the beginning of the essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain", Hughes makes a scathing attack on the middle-class families of the African Americans whom he has defined as 'Nordicized Negro intelligentsia' (1926,3), and has showed how they have prioritized the White mentality by putting and reading White newspapers and magazines at home. They often used to arrange parties for the white rich families. It, concomitantly, left an impact on the children of the African American community: 'Don't be like niggers', 'look how well a White man does things' (1926,1). All these forged a white culture and mere practicing of such white cultural tools by the Afro-Americans lagged behind their ancestral cultural heritage. In fact, iterative acts of white cultural habits by the blacks made the white culture alive. Such ideological repression, which the White mythology bears, makes the African Americans inert, submissive; it leads them to suffer from inferior complexity. Jhumpa Lahiri, a famous diasporic woman writer, has coined the term ABCD (American born confused Desi) in order to delineate the conditions of the second-genera-

tion immigrants as they are at the cultural crossroads. It made them confused as to how they should respond to such dichotomous cultures. Such is the condition of the America born Africans who were confused, completely oblivious to their ancestral culture, and were keen on underscoring the White cultural milieus. Thus, it created a rebuff for the proper progression of the black culture. Langston Hughes accentuated the construction of the Black racial mountain which was threatening to the White culture. White supremacy had reigned down the ages and clamped down the voices of the Blacks, and it would continue until the Blacks are not aware of their inner potentials and their own racial values. Contradictorily, while Salman Rushdie in his *Imaginary Homelands* classified such polarization as ghetto mentality that is a 'dangerous pitfall' (2010,19), Hughes insisted on building up such ghetto mentality to resurrect the battered voices of the Africans by making them conscious about their own ethno-cultural slabs. It implies that African Americans can generate their own homelands by hinging on their jazz, blues music and poetry. Thus, they would vindicate, as Hughes believed, their own racial mountain with their own racial pride. Hence, he proclaims:

> We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or theme. If White people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, it does not matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. The tom-tom cries and

> the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure does not matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on the top of the mountain free from within ourselves. (1926,4)

Hughes' insistence on upending the marginalized voice of the Blacks is a vital task through which he brings to the fore the Black aesthetics. Such expression was articulated in his poem "My People":

> The Night is beautiful,
> So the faces of my people.
> The Stars are beautiful,
> So the eyes of my people
> Beautiful, also, is the Sun
> Beautiful, also, are the souls of my people. (2012,5)

Thus, he reveals his sympathetic stature towards the African Americans. He bolsters a racial consciousness and cultural nationalism that redefines the Black identity through a literary ideological movement. The New Negro ideology revitalized African American culture by giving an extra push to the pusillanimity which the Blacks usually assumed. Hughes asked that the Blacks should not adhere to the Western European culture, but ought to be self-reliant so far as their own cultural issues are concerned. He tried to depict the 'low-life' in his art and poetry which indicated the actual lives of Blacks in the lower social economic strata. He attempted to erad-

icate divisions and prejudices inherent in the color of skin within the Black community. In fact, his work was preoccupied with the innocence and simplicity which Nature possessed.

Colonialism is a System: Alienation and Subjugation of the Black Women

In his poem '50-50', Langston Hughes unveils his pang for the Blacks who have been suffering from the circumstantial sluggishness as generated by the White culture. As a result, he compares the condition of black people to that of a woman's identity, which is even more precarious, as revealed in his poem '50-50.': "I am all alone in this World..." (2012,10). Blacks are usually represented under the Western eyes as concocted and adhering to what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak terms 'Epistemic violence'(Morris 25,2010). So, the poem reveals the subservient position of the Blacks whereby they are segregated from the rest of the community. The poem further, manifests the plight of a black lady who feels herself alienated and is in need of a help from a person. It reveals her lack of self-sufficiency and a familiar stature of dependence on another individual for identification. To this end, Big boy sums her stature as:

> Trouble with you is
> You ain't got no heed
> If you had a head and used your mind

You could have me with you
All the time (2012,10).

He seems to refer to her intellectual vacuity and short-sightedness in understanding her own importance in the society. Big boy puts forth his logic in an adroit manner which demands her negotiation with him. It, nonetheless, tends to forge the ground of her deprivation again. This happens due to her lack of self-sufficiency. Moreover, she is unenthusiastic about her own culture due to the influence of White superiority and forgets about the significance of being a woman of color in the society. She devalues herself and allows herself to be outwitted and exploited. The poem ends with a demand by Big boy, for a neo-liberated Black who becomes voluptuous and materialistic. Concomitantly, it leads him to say: "Share your bed–Share your money… too" (2012,10).

In fact, the oppressive colonial system – the superiority of one over another – is subjected to the test of its own discourse of benevolence for the subalterns. This poem is a true articulation of such benevolence, which is subversive at the core. Thus, Hughes crops up the sufferings of a violated black woman who is deprived sexually and economically. It also indicates how blacks were treated shabbily by the whites and how black bodies used to be considered as a means of reproduction especially in the realm of slavery. In addition, while black masculinity was

at stake in the public domain, the black males always tried to express their anger and protest in the domestic sphere by beating their women and children. Black women were considered as the epitome of sacredness in the Pre-Colonial African period, and were venerated as a spiritual power akin to Nature. They had the quality of leadership and individuality. But, Hughes' portrayal of the lady as lacking confidence and emotionally dependent as a result of identity complexity, demeans the Negritudinal African Woman image and strong personality of the Pre-colonial period. So, he has sharply condemned in the poem the lack of self-reliance of the lady in her double-yoked burden of identity, which is not Pan-Africanist or Negritudinal and not captured within Black/African culture. He, indeed, seeks to evoke a female power that the Black female slaves were known for in the lady that subverts sexist gender norms and superior/inferior dichotomy as designed by the prevailing cultural landscape.

Re-visiting Black lives through rivers: Encapsulating baggage of cultural heritage

'Negro Speaks of Rivers' is a beautiful poem by Langston Hughes in which he becomes nostalgic about his own ancestral African culture. Thus, he creates imaginary homelands within the host land by resorting to memories associated with his ancestral cultural heritage. He was daunted by looking at the damp spirit of African Americans, especially in retaining their own ethno-cul-

tural values in their new homeland that had swayed them from their ethnic identity. Hence, it is Hughes' *raison d'être* to bring back African consciousness in the host culture by eulogizing African rivers in the poem. It helps him foreground African consciousness in the new homeland. Africa becomes, to put in the words of Avtar Brah, a 'mythic place of desire' (2005,192) by means of his imaginative fiat. It is beyond the cartographical epistemology. His anticipation of his own African culture is overt in the poem:

> I've known rivers
> I've known rivers ancient as the World and older than the
> flow of human blood in human veins (2012,86).

He exposes his affinity with the rivers which refer to his deep-seated Afrocentricity. Such rivers are like the flow of blood in human veins. It also echoes nostalgically a historical past of the spillage of blood during the great crossing. From the beginning of the poem, there are several rivers such as "The Euphrates", "The Nile" and its "Pyramids", "The Mississipi" referred to in order to reinforce the ancient nature of the African heritage, its cultural strength and the new homeland experience. So, he states:

> `I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young
> I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe
Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its
Muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset (2012,86)

The poem dialogically holds conversation with the African American past as created through the poet's imaginative worlds merged by a past and a present in order to build a cohesive Black community. The speaker declares his knowledge for the benefit of his listeners, telling the story of a common past with a view to cultivate a unified consciousness in the present like the Whitemanian speaker of 'Sun Song'.

Dark ones of Africa
I bring you my song
To sing on the Georgia roads(2012,138).

The "I" that the poem projects, is both an exuberant individual and an embodiment of the community, which can contain multitudes.

Celebration of Jazz and Blues music as the ethno-cultural metaphor of articulating the Black aesthetics

In his poem 'The Weary Blues', the poet brings out the mourning of the Negroes who are alienated and de-

pressed due to perennial feelings of 'blackness'. The poet refers to the Jazz or blue music, being influenced by Whiteman and Carl Sandberg, which is thought to be their only means to express themselves freely. 'The Weary Blues', which contains the jazzy, musical rhythms, is latched on to the jazz culture; and it unfurls positive spirit to the readers.

> He played that sad raggy tune like musical fool
> Sweet blues
> Coming from black man's soul (2012,118).

Through this jazz music, he seeks to universalize his afflictions:

> Ain't got nobody in all the world
> Ain't got nobody but ma self
> And put matroubles on the self.(2012,118)

A Negro feels himself alienated from the world and so he is not happy: "I wish that I had died" (2012,118). And the poem ends with his weariness which indicates the cynical tune to life: "… Blue echoed through his head. He slept like a rock or a man that's dead" (2012,118).

Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the 'carnival' might help us understand the condition of the subaltern Blacks in this connection. Bakhtin's concept "…is derived from the practice of medieval carnival when, in an episode of

permitted license, the people would enjoy a holiday from their labours and in the process lampoon the authorities of church and state" (Brooker 2003, 24). For the marginalized Blacks, such jazz and blues are instrumental in celebrating their joy and sadness freely through their own language in powerful and evocative manners; and it resonates with the ecstasy associated with the concept of 'carnival'. However, such music, a tale of their sufferings and enjoyment, offers them a site for freedom from such an enveloping environment to enjoy a reversal of the power structure.

Dominant West and Emergent Blacks: 'Subaltern' does not remain 'Subaltern'

In another poem 'The Ballad of the Landlord', the poet nicely articulates the inhuman and exploitative behavior of the landlord towards a black: representing the stereotypical stratification between the White and the black prevalent in the society. Racial discrimination and White supremacy are nicely overt in this poem. In the conversation between the Negro and the landlord, the Negro says:

> My roof has sprung a leak
> Don't you remembered told you about it
> Why last week? (2012,110).

But the reason behind showing his reluctance to repair the leakage is that the Negro has a due of ten bucks. The

Negro then says:

> Ten bucks more'n I will pay you
> Till you fix this house up now (2012,110).

Next a new kind of protest grows in his mind and he unfurls his fume against his landlord by proclaiming,

> What! You gonna get eviction orders
> You gonna cut off my heat?
> You gonna take my furniture and
> Throw it in the street? (2012,110).

Then the White landlord threatens him by saying 'you talking high and mighty' (2012,110). It reflects that a Negro does not have any right to unveil his grievances. The landlord attempts to maintain his dominance by calling on the police to douse the Negro's rebellion. The police arrives at the place and arrests the Negro. Finally, the judgment goes against the Negro; it compels the Negro to go for an imprisonment for ninety days in the county. Here, the poet addresses the miserable condition of the Negroes in a White-dominated society in which a Negro can barely speak of his inconveniences and disadvantages. The state policy of quelling the rebellious voices of the Blacks is indeed a strategic step to retain the superior position of the Whites, and to diminish any further possibility of the collective protest of the blacks. The incident of calling on the police by the landlord in the poem can be argued in the light of Zizek's order of the police:

> The order of the police is never simply a positive order: to function at all, it has to cheat, to misname, and so on- in short, to engage in politics, to do what its subversive opponents are supposed to do (Zizek 2007, 235).

In fact, the systematic oppression and inhuman torture of the Blacks by the Whites is neatly manifested in this poem, which adds a level of militancy into their minds, but it ends with a negative implication.

'Theme for English-B' is another beautiful poem by Hughes which harps on the fervent plea of a Negro to forge an alternative world for them in which they can explore their own desires:

> Well, I like to eat, sleep, drink, and be in love
> I like to work, read, learn, and understand life
> I like a pipe for a Christmas present,
> Or records—Bessie, bop, or Bach (2012,119).

In fact, the stereotypical representation of the Blacks as the others, naive, and uneducated is challenged by the Negro in this poem. The White cultural dominance seems to be a lifelong imprisonment for the Negroes. Hence, being a representative of the Black community, he sings a song of disregard for the White culture, and thus articulates his allegiance towards the African culture. So, he proclaims,

Sometimes perhaps you don't want to be a part of me
Nor do I often want to be a part of you (2012,119).

He further says,
I guess you learn from me
Although you're older and white
And somewhat more free (2012,119).

So, English-B is nothing but a separate space of Negroes which will not be dominated by the Whites.
'I too', a dramatic monologue and blue lyric, is replete with an individual Black's mourning regarding his subjective invisibility in this world. The poem refers to the dream of a Negro to be recognized as a beautiful and legible figure in this planet:

They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed
I, too, am America (2012,57).

Thus, like other poems, Hughes imagines a self-sufficient existence for the Blacks, who can represent themselves on their own.

Conclusion

Harlem is a metaphor as well as the reference point for Langston Hughes, especially in articulating his verve associated with the Harlem Renaissance. Langston Hughes so stated,

> I live in the heart of Harlem. I have also lived in the heart of Paris, Madrid, Shanghai and Mexico City. The people of Harlem seem not very different from others, except in language. I love the color of their languages and, being a Harlemite myself, their problems and interests.(Davis 1952,276)

Hughes reverted to his own African Culture in order to reinforce his ethnic culture inherent in his blood. He, through his literary and critical works, raised his objection and intolerance with the tradition in which African Americans were enslaved in the post-slave era, too. He felt an urgency to bring back such folk culture and oral tradition to resurrect the souls of the Black folks to their cultural identity. Hughes depicts the joy and hardships of the working class black lives through his literary works. He tries his level best to animate the courage of protest among the black people in general so that they can create their existence on their own. Harlem Renaissance inspired the Negritude movement as well. Langston Hughes is utterly class conscious and is quite critical of receiving Western education as reflected in his autobiography *The Big Sea* (1963) wherein Hughes throws the books collected from the host country on the sea in order to avert the burden of White mythology. It shows the path of his moral dipsomania deeply rooted in his own cultural milieu. However, Langston Hughes as a representative of African American cultural heri-

tage, through his poems referred to in this article, has attempted to preserve their folk heritage as an enviable means of assuring cultural and group survival.

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"Words That Turn Mirrors of Words": Political Intertextualities in Elias Khoury's Children of the Ghetto[1]

Omri Ben Yehuda

"When words are many, crime is not absent,
but he who holds his tongue is wise."
(Book of Proverbs 10:19)

Palestinian testimony is entrapped. Perhaps it is the most arduous, failed and exhausted performance of historical and literary speech in Western history, not only because the perpetrators are victims themselves but because they are the ultimate victims of the ethos of an entire civilization: the West in the aftermath of the Second World War (Goldberg and Hazan 2015). For this reason, even 74 years after the Nakba and more than hundred years since the Balfour Declaration's decision to tear their land apart, Palestinians are hard put to find addressees for their narrative. Elias Khoury is universally acclaimed for his sweeping epos of the Palestinian Nakba in the coun-

try's northern regions in his novel *Gate of the Sun* (1998). The novel not only bases its multiple plots on testimonies to which Khoury served as a very attentive listener, but meticulously unravels the question of historical and literary narratives – fragmented, subjective– as he has done throughout his long and prolific career (Mejcher-Atassi 2010, 95).

In his latest project, a trilogy of novels (2016-), Khoury tackles his enduring goal of narrating the continuous Nakba from a different perspective: instead of the deprived Palestinians, he deals with the divided and tormented figure of the Palestinian Israeli, a convoluted identity that has many other formulations: "the Palestinians of 48," "Israeli Arabs" or "Palestinians with Israeli citizenship." The central protagonist of these novels was raised by Israeli Jews, Holocaust survivors no less, thus inextricably entangling the Nakba with the Holocaust. In this study, I argue that *Children of the Ghetto: My Name is Adam*, the first in the trilogy, is a remarkable testimony not to trauma itself but to the inability of trauma to reach out and obtain a listener. I do so by comparing it with two fundamental intertexts- Khoury's *Gate of the Sun* and the symbol of the Palestinian narrative in Hebrew letters: the novel *Arabesques* (1986) by Anton Shammas to whom *Children of the Ghetto* is dedicated. I argue that Khoury's endeavor reflects the diminished possibility for testimonial discourse which runs parallel to the actual political reality of the Palestinian struggle for recognition.

Children of the Ghetto elucidates the condition of a trauma that lacks listeners: its immersion in narcissistic circles of literary mimesis, in excessive sophisticated formulations of storytelling, in descriptive speech (of telling rather than showing) which fails to reach out and act in the world, even results in the end in a difficulty to achieve and render the position of a witness. The figure of the witness – here a Palestinian Israeli who embodies the ordeals of Israeliness and the Holocaust – becomes merely a detached symbol, ungraspable through speech and something which Arab letters only describe from a distance. The frustration arising from the impossibility of reaching out and finding a listener or of acting politically in the world by way of giving witness, and the corresponding frustration over the difficulty in speaking for the witness that inhibits his development into a convincing literary figure, reveal the gap between narratives, languages and traumas. In the interests of full disclosure, my position as reader in some way mirrors Khoury's position as an Arab writer who writes about the erudite Arab-Israeli while lacking a sufficient knowledge of the Hebrew language: I am a Mizrahi-Israeli-Jew whose work focuses on Israeli and Holocaust literatures, and therefore although I speak Arabic, I am a neophyte and outsider in the world of Arab letters, but nevertheless I represent in many ways the precise object of Khoury's remarkable political endeavor.

Clichés: The Exhaustion of Trauma

The title of a book by the two French psychologists Françoise Davoine and Jean-Max Gaudillière reads *Whereof One Cannot Speak, Thereof One Cannot Stay Silent* which captures the contradiction inherent in the experience of trauma and its possible narration and recoveries (LaCapra 2013, 54). In his novel *Children of the Ghetto: My Name is Adam*, Elias Khoury's attempt to address the ongoing Palestinian catastrophe from 1948 onwards, is an extreme example of this circular argument that captures on the one hand literature's powerlessness to adequately confront catastrophe, and on the other, the effort to corroborate its aftermath with words. The circular endeavor around events that are not entirely graspable with words thus implies that every literary account of trauma is some form of excess.

The motivation of Khoury's novel, in a nutshell, is to address that which the West never addresses, which is Palestinian pain, but in so doing, it also reaches the inherent limits of literature's ability to adequately deliver pain and the empathetic testimony that might regenerate it (hence finding itself superfluous). In her work on testimony, Shoshanah Felman has shown that testimony is an act of communication which necessitates, more than any other, an addressee, someone who is willing not only to listen but also to interpret and decipher an expression which is challenging and inaccessible in form and

in content (Felman and Laub 1992, 42). In confronting a trauma with no addressee and no listener, whose victims and witnesses are cast aside, Khoury's novel bumps into excess alone, turning the process of narration into a series of unceasing and restless attempts to reach out, to talk, to explain, which quickly give way to a frustrated retreat into silence, oblivion and even destruction.[2]

Also a literary critic, Khoury was one of the first to note that the Nakba is an ongoing trauma, of which 1948 only marks the beginning (Khoury 2012). Catastrophe, like any other type of collapse, is, by its nature, temporary and always suggests an equilibrium that precede and follow it. For this reason, traumas are normally single and frequently very short-lived. But what happens if the continuous murder of a people lasts several years? And what happens if sustained state violence against a people continues for decades? Moreover, what happens if the immense cost of the former in terms of time, number of victims, and its effect on successive generations, is the very basis that allows the existence of the latter? Understanding the existence of Jews and Palestinians in Israel-Palestine as mutually exclusive suggests that extinction is the latent fuel of the occupation, [3] and what I believe lies behind *Children of the Ghetto*'s aporetic frustration of a constant process of reaching out by testimonies that never elicit reactions. Since the process of testifying is constant, the process of articulating trauma with words is bound by repetition and even clichés. In addition, since silencing one trauma is justified by the

articulation of another trauma, the same process of reaching out and of articulation is bound also by the latter's repetitions and clichés.[4] I believe that this is pertinent to the Palestinian struggle as a whole, and if Israel, Zionism and the Jewish Question (always a European question) are conceived as a continuous project, then the understanding of the Nakba as continuous must also partake in this cycle of exhaustions and clichés. Israeli-Jewish suffering is in itself more imaginary than real; it is based more on clichés than on the complexities of reality, which of course, in many cases, also involve the real suffering of Israelis and Jews. Therefore, Palestinian suffering also becomes trivial.

Children of the Ghetto is a reaction to Khoury's acclaimed *Gate of the Sun*, which was applauded by critics and academics and is still considered to be the most important and comprehensive depiction of the Nakba (Aljahdali 2019, 554). *Gate of the Sun* consciously tries to avoid mirroring the Holocaust, but due to its Scheherazadean form of retelling narratives of victimhood, also runs the risk of prolonging a counterproductive melancholia, the outcome of being confined to one narrative, in the way the Jews are confined to the Holocaust (Razinsky and Goldberg 2019, 63, 65).[5]

Children of the Ghetto returns to many of the themes of *Gate of the Sun*, the long shadow of which is apparent from the outset, in Khoury's preface where he addresses his protagonist Adam as a non-fictive man who him-

self challenges Khoury and his earlier work's reliability as fiction, by claiming that *Gate of the Sun* is part of reality. This inversion, with Khoury maintaining that *Gate of the Sun* is fictive while addressing Adam as real, and Adam claiming that *Gate of the Sun* is real while he himself is fictive, pits them against one another in a rivalry that escalates in their common pursuit after the young and beautiful Sarang Ligh, Adam's friend and Khoury's student at NYU. In the preface, Khoury clashes, almost violently, with Adam's troubled and tormented personality in his role as author. In what follows, I examine this conflict between a (fictive?) writer and his (fictive?) protagonist-writer against the backdrop of the frustration of writing a testimony which fails to produce addressees. I will elaborate on this question by exploring how continuous trauma becomes a cliché, and how it transforms colonial mimicry into appropriation. Both mimicry/appropriation and clichés are the outcome of the failure of victims and witnesses to gain attention, thereby losing the ability to use language as a means for human agency and recognition. I conclude with the question of aesthetics so as to expand the comparative study of Khoury's endeavor to write his work within the long, and perhaps over-burdened and exhaustive tradition of Hebrew literature about Palestinian citizens of Israel, the aim and frame of his novel and his (fictive? allegorical?) protagonist. But before delving to these intertextual readings, I wish to discuss excess.

Excess: The Telling of a Muted Thirst

Children of the Ghetto opens with a preface by Elias Khoury, the author himself, followed by the novel's protagonist and narrator Adam Dannoun's introductory testimony, which leads to another introduction (number one according to Khoury/Dannoun) to the novel Dannoun is attempting to write about the Omayyad poet Waddah al-Yaman. Then, a further six introductions are followed for the al-Yaman novel, which Dannoun abandons altogether. The failure to address the Omayyad poet and his trauma – itself a muted trauma – leads Adam to focus on the story of his own life, which constitutes the second major section of *Children of the Ghetto*. Having become fairly acquainted with Adam through his multiple introductions, his diary-like notes (edited by Khoury) now expose us to the complexities of his life: he is an attractive fifty-year old Palestinian of Israeli citizenship who lives in New York and sells falafel, a true connoisseur of both Arabic and Hebrew literature, and totally immersed in the history of Israel-Palestine. We begin to learn of his childhood in Lydda, during the military rule over Palestinians who resided within the 1948 borders of the newly-established state.

Adam's upbringing in what became the Palestinian ghetto in Lydda, is marked by manifold details of lineage and identities which also suggest excess. He has three alternative fathers: Hasan Dannoun, a hero of the Pal-

estinian resistance; the blind and well-versed Ma'moun who raised him together with his mother Manal, and the biological father about whom he knows nothing, having been found as a baby on his dead mother's breast during the war. From the very beginning of Adam's notes, it is clear that his story almost completely parallels the history of his people, as he himself asks "Am I the son of the story?" (Khoury 2016, 117). The excess of his identity, soon to be unraveled not only between the three possible fathers – all victims of the Nakba – but also between the purchased identity as a descendant of Holocaust survivors (the fourth father is the fictive Yitzhak Danoun), is the excess of the story of one trauma that was almost entirely silenced by another: the Holocaust that has become not only the bedrock of Israeli Jewish identity and the justification of state violence towards Arabs, but a mark of Western civilization. In his own words, he is the "satiated child of the story and of thirst. My story's water never runs dry and my thirst is never quenched" (Khoury 2019, 103; 2016, 118).

The final section of the novel, titled "The Ghetto Days," continues with Adam's notes, focusing this time on the retelling of testimonies related to him by witnesses, among them the American-Palestinian doctor Mikhail Samara, Khalil Ayoub (the protagonist of Khoury's novel *Gate of the Sun* who met Adam in Ramallah in 1997), Ma'moun, who became a scholar of Arabic literature in Cairo, his (adopted) mother Manal, and culminating with

the testimony of Murad al-Alami, whom Adam met by chance in his falafel shop. This last testimony becomes increasingly graphic and shocking, recalling the horrors familiar from the Holocaust, which are evoked with particular vividness in the sub-chapter entitled "Sonder-kommando" that describes the responsibility placed on the inmates of the Lydda ghetto to bury and burn the bodies of their own people.

To the excesses of the plot and its many contradictory possibilities (which are part and parcel of Adam's shattered identity) we must add the aesthetic of his language, which Adam himself frequently discusses in complex meta-lingual terms. If silence is a theme that Adam addresses both in his notes and in his incomplete novel on al-Yaman, then an aporia is self-evident not only in relation to trauma but in relation to words themselves that are never adequate for silence. The clearest example is provided in the discussion between Adam and his de-facto father Ma'moun about literature's ability to describe colors, with reference both to Ma'moun's congenital blindness and to his literary investigations of silence, in particular its crucial poetic function in the work of the Palestinian national poet Mahmoud Darwish. Here, Ma'moun tells Adam that the Arabs are masters of description because of the Jahiliyyah poetry, and that he believes that description – where things become words – functions as a mechanism for dealing with the world. Although he fails to describe colors, he does not live in

darkness: "I don't live in the color black because I don't know what you mean by that word… history is blind, Naji, my beloved, and it takes a blind man like me to see it" (Ibid 2019, 148; 2016, 142-143), implying that trauma and history are not a void or an absence, but possess a latent presence which requires special sensitivities. In the same way, the Nakba, and more specifically in this context, the Lydda massacre, demands that its addressees and probably its witnesses as well, be in possession of exceptional qualities, since trauma, like colors, requires an unusual understanding. Although Adam repeatedly bemoans the impotence of language to match events, and eschews the abundance of descriptive and figurative speech, he nonetheless employs many metaphors that stretch the extremes of tautology and oxymoron, such as "there is nothing that could resemble love like (but) love."[6] When describing his Jewish lover Dalia, he expresses discomfort with his trope: "... she was as beautiful as silence (if that is the proper expression to describe a woman covered with her own shadow and a silence that spoke without words)" (2019, 111; 2016, 105). At other times, silence leads him to complete contradictions that signal again void and destruction, disabling any prospect of the accountability of words: "I shouldn't have been, in order to be."[7] Enumerating all his attempts to recreate himself – by leaving the ghetto, as a student at the university of Haifa, as a journalist, etc. – he ends at the seventh and current attempt (an echo of the number of his attempts to write al-Yaman's story): the writing of

these very notes, whose words resemble shrouds (2019, 118; 2016, 123). Writing precipitates his destruction.

This same simile of likening language to shrouds, will be elaborated further in the fourth section ("The Days of the Ghetto"), through excessive use of figurative language: "Language isn't formed of dust; it is the opposite of all other creature that die. The problem of language is its corpse, because it stays with us… we find ourselves chewing its corpse in our mouths… [I] found myself before the corpse of a language for which we can find no grave… I'm exhausted now. I feel as though words are no longer capable of saying anything…"[8] A metalinguistic discussion of figurative speech is interwoven here with figurative speech itself, where the simile – language as dust – is articulated in a visceral, graphic and again excessive way: although it is uneatable, we chew it nonetheless. Language's futility or deficiency is expressed through excessiveness, which leads to frustration and exhaustion; it is the generation of something that fails to generate.[9]

The Holocaust, the Nakba and the Limits of Comparison

While *Gate of the Sun* embodies most of the themes of *Children of the Ghetto*, it does not share its self-violence, excessiveness and frustration. It also never descends into the tautological formulation we have seen, which

I believe is the outcome of an over-indulgence in the many traits praised by critics in literary engagements with trauma: the fragmented nature of literature that escapes history's tendency towards teleological narratives of a unified and solid identity.[10] I believe that while critics tend to immerse themselves in these aesthetics to the point of self-indulgence, which is a natural outcome of the coupling of art and trauma, they also fail to see its exhaustion, which marks *Children of the Ghetto*'s potential to shed new light on this coupling. The limitations of Khoury's latest novel mark an important achievement (contradictory as this may seem), in its unraveling of many of the shortcomings in the understanding and articulation of trauma in mimetic representation.

Almost all of *Children of the Ghetto* 's themes are to be found in the earlier novel, which also discusses meta-poetical questions and deals with literary descriptions as such, or the ability to address historical truth through testimony (Khoury 1998, 203-204); literature or the "reliable" histories of documents and archives (a theme most overtly manifested in the conflict between Khoury and Adam). Moreover, the Nakba in *Gate of the Sun* was conceived also via the Holocaust, tellingly expressed by Edward Said in his classic phrase referring to the Palestinians as the victims of the victims, an observation that reverberates in Nahilah's words to an Israeli officer in 1948: "We are the Jews' Jews" (Khoury 2006, 365; 1998, 372). The narrator and principal protagonist, Khalil Ayoub, rejects the indiscriminate use of this epithet in

present day Lebanon because its relevance is restricted to the Palestinians in Israel who are subject to Jewish, that is, foreign rule (Ibid.). It is the massacre in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps that triggers the comparison between Jews and Palestinians in *Gate of the Sun* and as we see, Khalil stresses Arab sovereignty and culpability in this disaster, whose both perpetrators and victims are Arab. Adam refers specifically to Khalil's use of the famous metaphor from Isaiah (53:7) of sheep being led to the slaughter, one that he elaborates further in the story of the muted poet al-Yaman, but rebukes it for a different reason: he does not like these historical comparisons because they turn war crimes into predetermined events and the victims into anonymous numbers that obscure their own particular tragedy (Khoury 2016, 212-213).

While both reservations are pertinent and important, Khoury himself, in a specific reference to *Gate of the Sun* in his academic writing, appears to be leaning towards an affirmation of the equation:

> Twelve years after the publication of my book I see the Nakba as a process without an end. I tried to create mirrors instead of allegories and metaphors; the allegory pretends to reflect reality, while mirrors reflect other mirrors. My stories were mirrors of stories, and pain mirrored pain... the story betrayed my suppositions; the protagonists did not reveal their memories. On the contrary, they were living the present (Khoury 2012, 266).

It is difficult to pinpoint precisely what distinguishes mirroring from allegory, but it is clear that mirrors are Khoury's way of understanding the Nakba as a continuous trauma, the outcome of the fact that every story, and indeed every testimony, relates to the present but reverberates the past. On re-examining this excerpt now, after the publication of *Children of the Ghetto*, it seems that Khoury also accommodates the Holocaust into this cyclical mirroring of pain that has foreshadowed in the past and that (re)projects again from the present into the past. In the same article, he points out that "the western world found that washing its hands of Jewish blood with Palestinian blood was the easiest way to break with the atrocities of the Second World War" (Ibid., 261), calling into play the reciprocity that relates to Biblical and Christian victimhood and surrendering the Palestinian cause to this teleology. Finally, in spite of decrying the comparison between the Holocaust and the Nakba, Khoury juxtaposes them in all of the three confrontations (in the essay and the two novels) which is no doubt an important gesture, but one that cannot challenge the basic assumption of constant pain that mirrors pain and that even jeopardizes a melancholic self-indulgence in pain, exhaustion and despair.[12]

As intimated, apart from *Gate of the Sun* which manifests agency and responsibility among Arabs themselves (Lebanese and even Palestinians), nowhere in these analytical reflections about the pairing of the Holocaust and

the Nakba is there self-criticism. The comparisons at no time examine the nature of the victims, even though the difference between them is both so obvious and at the same time so fundamental to the Jewish perception of the Shoah as an exceptional occurrence. As an historical event, the Shoah must be perceived in comparative terms, as a genocide rooted in imperialism and racism. Ethnic cleansing is also a latent mark of Israeli state violence against Palestinians. The Jewish people, however, were not targeted by the Nazi machine out of expansionist or territorial ambitions, but because they were regarded as inherently evil. While Jews were victimized simply because they were Jews, Palestinian are victims of a national struggle (its settler-colonial ambitions notwithstanding) where both sides – and here one can almost talk of symmetry – seek self-determination (hence relies on mutually exclusion). This is a bitter pill to swallow, but is exactly what separates the Nakba from the Holocaust: both share many of the universal aspects of the Holocaust, but the belief that the Jews represent a global threat and should be annihilated from the earth is a peculiar and unique aspect of the Holocaust not shared by the Nakba. Only when one recognizes this can one fully grasp the underlying universal and hence comparable aspect of the two catastrophes which is the fundamental requirement for co-habitation: in Palestine/ Israel as in the rest of the earth. It seems that Khoury's formulations of mirroring traumas frequently collapse precisely into what Bashir and Goldberg have dubbed

"identification with the other," which, according to Dominique LaCapra's theory, might jeopardize the ability to process (*durcharbeiten*, work-through) catastrophe by recognizing the fundamental difference of the other (Bashir and Goldberg 2018, 22). Failing to recognize difference, identification risks narcissistic appropriation of one's other, or subjugation to it, both potentially violent (Ibid.).

"The gray zone," was a term coined by Primo Levi for cases in which the distinction between perpetrator and victims is not entirely feasible, as in the collaboration of Jews with their oppressors. *Gate of the Sun* consists almost entirely of the narrator Khalil's lengthy monologue addressed to the now comatose Yunes, a Palestinian resistance fighter of the generation expelled from the Galilee in 1948. Confronting the muted patriarch (a crucial theme in *Children of the Ghetto*) with stories of parents who abandoned their children under trees (a mythological story/testimony that parallels Adam Dannoun's own story) or even killed them for fear of being discovered by the Israelis, Khalil accuses Yunes: "You like things clear and simple. The murderer is a known quantity, and the victim, too, and it's up to us to see that justice is done. Unfortunately, my brother, it wasn't as simple as us and them. It was something else that's hard to defined" (Khoury 2006, 210; 1998, 211). This gray zone resembles many of the Holocaust testimonies that were recorded during the catastrophe in diaries, and other

forms of confessions where extreme situations of deprivation have led to rivalry among family members. This "zone" also encompasses Jewish functionaries and collaborators, still a highly contentious issue in Holocaust memory. But this universal link to the Holocaust, which in fact renders every claim by an oppressed people more plausible and worthy of attention – indeed, those testimonies are exactly what de-sacralizes the Holocaust and makes the monstrous accessible – did not find its way to *Children of the Ghetto*. For this reason, even the term *Sonderkommando*, which became a type of proper name in Holocaust narratives, and here applies to Murad's horrendous testimony, fails to arouse the survivors' existential conflicts and sense of guilt which are so prevalent in Holocaust literary accounts (Khoury 2016, 379-380).

Contesting the Self: *Gate of the Sun*

Turning now to the question of authorship and testimony which is a principal theme in both novels, my analysis suggests that in this regard as well, *Gate of the Sun* is more daring and polyphonic than *Children of the Ghetto.*[13] I argued in an earlier paper that Khoury's depiction in *Gate of the Sun* of a Jewish Lebanese woman who dwells in the former house of a Palestinian women who now lives in Beirut, tends to symmetry and implies a sterile and monophonic equation according to which each women yearns for her lost origins (Ben Yehuda 2018, 261). On the other hand, I also claim that the novel's narration

is polyphonic and that its narratological motivation is founded entirely on connections with the other. Like Shahrazad, Khalil recounts stories to Yunes so that he will stay alive, albeit in a coma. For this reason, his monologue, which provides the story's narratological thread, is suffused with expressions of appeal and entreaty (in most cases, Khalil's ability to recount is contingent on his asking Yunes: "Do you remember?"). Like Yalo's plea to his judges in Khoury's long narratological experiment with monologues in *Yalo* (2002), Khalil's monologue is a speech act which aspires to resurrect its interlocutor, and therefore the full consideration it shows its addressee informs its dialogical formulation. The monologue frequently contains responses and answers, and the speaker rebukes his mute partner for arguing with him – "Please, don't speak of betrayal – […] I'm not using your story to complete my own" (Khoury 2006, 137; 1998, 135) – and although sustaining all the while a syntactical clarity and an elevated linguistic register which descends into "telling" rather than "showing,"[14] it maintains conflictual emotions and self-reflection. Thus Khalil reproaches Yunes for failing to understand the Arab world and its penchant for civil war (Khoury 1998, 415), and for his and his generation's blindness to the Holocaust and to Jewish suffering (Bashir and Goldberg 2018, 20-22).

The narrative voice in the multiple stories/testimonies within other stories changes a number of times, shifting between several first person storytellers who all ultimately derive from Khalil's own voice. This is most

clearly exemplified in the story of Jamal, who recounts in the first person the story of his mother, a Palestinian Muslim woman of German-Jewish origin living in Gaza, and addresses Khalil, who then shifts to become the narrator himself, turning now, in the present, to his addressee, the French actress Catherine and then giving way to yet another narrator who addresses him (Khalil) in the third person ("said Khalil"; Khoury 1998, 437). Who is the narrator now?[15] Is it Khalil in the present, recounting to Yunes his meeting with Catherine and using the third person to refer to himself (in another time, after the Sabra and Shatila massacre)? Or is this, for the first time in the novel, the voice of the implied author, that is, Elias Khoury's voice?

Another dimension to the estrangement of Khalil's monologue from his mute interlocutor is revealed in the land of the Galilee that they are both forbidden to enter. Yunes' muteness converges with Palestine's absence both in terms of the restrictions imposed on the movement of Palestinian refugees, and historically, in the absence of a Palestine that existed in Yunes' lifetime but de facto ceased to exist in 1948. In one of the most powerful moments in the novel, where all these elements are channeled and merge into Khalil's speech, he relates this estrangement from the Galilee in contrast with the land's biblical dedication to all the nations by Jesus' virtue, a land made for foreigners (Khoury 1998, 412-413). A significant theme in *Gate of the Sun* is literature's ability to adequately convey reality, a concern that also lies at

the heart of *Children of the Ghetto*, as is apparent both in Adam's notes and even more noticeably in Elias Khoury's unsettling preface. Addressing Yunes as "my father," Khalil charges narration with blurring the self by its smudging of the boundaries between fiction and reality, also implying that the inability to differentiate between them characterizes the testimonies given by victims from Yunes' generation: "But, you see, I've been infected by Umm Hassan and have started talking about these people as though I knew them personally while I don't know them at all." This is precisely what provokes Khoury and Adam's violent conflict in the preface to *Children of the Ghetto*.

Here is an excerpt from Khalil's dialogical monologue to Yunes which foreshadows almost explicitly the violent exchange between Adam and Khoury. Not surprisingly, Khalil renders here a violent clash between himself and Yunes' doctor:

> "I'm doing my duty. There's no room for pity in our profession."
> "Pity! You're crazy. You don't know what Yunes represents."
> "Yunes! What does Yunes represent?"
> "He's a symbol."
> "And how can we cure symbols?" he asked. "There's no place for symbols in a hospital. The place for symbols is in books."
> "But he is a hero. This is impossible. A hero does not

> end his life in a cemetery of living people."
> "But he's finished."
> When I heard the word finished everything tipped over the edge. I don't remember exactly what spilled out of me – that you were the first, that you were Adam, that nobody was going to touch you, that I'd kill anyone who got near you.
> The doctor tried to calm me down, but I got more and more enraged. (Khoury 2006, 168-169)

Thus, this dialogical exchange with the doctor leads to Khalil's dialogical monologue that addresses an absent addressee who is in many ways a reflection of the self. Here, Khalil refers to Yunes as "*adam*," the patriarch, but foresees another adam, Adam Dannoun, at the same time.

A similar heated encounter takes place between Khoury and Adam at the screening of an Israeli film in New York, where Khoury rages at Adam for being an "idiot who doesn't understand a thing" because Khoury has written a fictional story unconnected to the writing of history, and thus he is unaware of the fate of his characters in reality: "I don't know why the guy insisted that he knew the characters in my novel [*Gate of the Sun*], but he started raving like a madman…" (Khoury 2019, 15-16; 2016, 14). For Adam, as for Khalil and Um Hassan (and her entire generation), the boundaries between fiction and reality have become blurred, and they cannot distinguish between fictional characters and real people, or

between stories and history. But while in *Gate of the Sun* a dialogue is always conveyed by "showing" (that is, by mimetically rendered speech acts, as a performative mean in the plot, keeping Yunes alive, an insistence on dialogical exchange), the brutal accusations in the preface to *Children of the Ghetto* are not "shown" but "told," with Khoury subjecting his interlocutors to his own point of view in his recounting of the events. Moreover, his position in the argument with Adam counters this heritage of storytelling by insisting that stories have nothing to do with reality or with history.

This is not, however, the entire picture. At the end of the preface, in an unusual literary occurrence, the names of the storyteller Elias Khoury and the author Elias Khoury merge completely in a signature. Appending a preface to a piece of fiction, in which the storyteller incorporates the fictitious into the real by drawing attention to writing and reading as performative acts, is a device used by novelists from the very beginnings of this literary form. The self-reflexive gesture becomes even more common in the twentieth century, in the work of Borges for example, who is a cardinal reference both in *Gate of the Sun* and *Children of the Ghetto*. But here, the author actually appends his signature to the end of the preface, indicating not only his name (along with many autobiographical details such as his occupation as a writer and professor), but also his whereabouts and the time of writing: "Elias Khoury, New-York/Beirut, 12 July

2015" (Khoury 2016, 18). In Genette's discussion of the "fictive auctorial or authorial prefaces" this device can be traced back to Walter Scott who foreshadows Borges, Pessoa and others in this "unsettling masquerade" of an "It cannot be I, for it is I" (and even uses Shakespeare's historical plays as authoritative historical texts; Genette 1997, 287-288). But these paratextual elements are always humorous and carefully avoided by authors who try to achieve realistic transparency (Ibid, 293). It comes almost as no surprise that one of Genette's subtitles is none other than "Mirrors," as he stresses the narcissistic element of prefaces in autobiography and in fiction generally, where the self-conscious is so immersed in this cyclical "mirroring and mimicking," underlining the fact that in writing life is always secondary to the machinery of writing (292).

It is not necessary to scrutinize Khoury's gesture in light of the history of the novel, in order to discern its uniqueness as a fiction that pertains not only to reality, but more specifically to one of the most repressed traumas in the world. Considering *Gate of the Sun*'s reputation as one of the most important books about Palestinian history, trauma and quest for self-determination, Khoury's authorial act in *Children of the Ghetto* is startling. Genette himself points out that the preface is quintessentially literary, and like other paratextual activity, risks usurping the focus of the text itself (293). In Khoury's case this becomes a political issue, not only because of

the bold paratextual act – which itself demands our attention over the rest of the text, which is Adam's – but mainly because this act directly confronts questions of authorship, claims on reality and appropriation[17].

The idea of justice and justification resonates in the Arabic phrase *"la yahiqqu li*" (I don't have the right) that Khoury repeats thrice in the preface, the first time in his angry outburst against Adam at the Israeli film screening, where he says self-reflexively, "… I have no right to insinuate myself in the stories of the author of these notebooks," and even urges the reader to be "the judge between me and him,"[18] underlining the gravity of the literary accountability at stake: two contested testimonies in a latent trial where the reader is asked to be the judge. The second time occurs when Khoury tells his friend Chaim, the Israeli film director, that Adam is a liar, because he pretends to be Israeli when he is Palestinian, and that he believes that Khoury "had no right to write about Palestine just because I wasn't born of Palestinian parents!" (Khoury 2019, 16; 2016, 15). The speech act here – I do or do not have the right to write about Palestine – is very forceful (the paragraph closes with an exclamation mark) and suggests a genuine discomfort with the act of narrating testimonies. While signaling doubts (I don't have the right) it also establishes a bond with Adam by poetically referring to the theme of patriarchy and authorship, where, as we saw, Adam's many possible fathers are an integral component of the national story.[19] Here, perhaps, Khoury becomes Adam.

Khoury discredits himself for the third time (by saying "I don't have the right") towards the end of the preface, where he points out that he does not have the right to turn Adam's notes into endnotes of any sort, which leads to the decision to publish them in the same format as the remainder of the text (Khoury 2016, 17). After all the doubts, which are the mark of a genuine confrontation with the entire endeavor of writing literature, writing history, and especially the right to speak for the subalterns, Khoury's signature at the end of the preface seems even more audacious. In order to understand this gesture politically we must contend that this Narcissus endeavor of mirroring (Khoury who is and is not Khoury) has a twofold purpose: on the one hand it provides reassurance and accepts complete accountability, but on the other hand it is filled with doubts and discredits his own authorship. This is patently a case of aporia. By dismantling the possibility of differentiating between cause and effect, Khoury dissolves authorship and the ability to write, indeed to bear witness, into a cyclical production of language which dismantles its ability to act in the world. His language of mirrors de-historicizes the Palestinian narrative, not only by rendering it a part of the cyclical mirror image of traumas (at the end of which, contrary to what Adam believes, the Palestinian story continues to dissolve into the Holocaust and de facto is eradicated by it) but more fundamentally, by yielding to what J.L. Austin dubbed the "etiolated" aspect of literature. In his famous lecture series entitled

"How to Do Things with Words," the great theoretician of speech-acts has outlined how literature does not participate in the world, and again, from the same reasons Genette understood paratextual activity, that is, the moment when words are completely immersed in reporting (telling) rather than "doing" (Hillis-Miller 2001, 47).

The dialogue and speech act in *Gate of the Sun*– addressing Yunes in order to keep him alive, insisting on language's ability to reach out – become in *Children of the Ghetto* a futile and perhaps narcissistic immersion in one's own words, in an endless paratext. Austin's basic differentiation between performative speech that acts in the world, and descriptive speech which reports about the world and can therefore be judged to be true or false, assumes here a poignancy in its reflection of the content, which is itself a debate about truthfulness in the applicability of literature to reality, and thus partakes again in a double and cyclical remoteness from the world. The appeal to the reader to be the judge in Adam and Khoury's altercation opens up the possibility for dialogue for the first time, but also reaffirms that this trial exhausts the substance of testimony and literature. The absence of a listener discredits the narrative, impairing the ability to bear witness, and underlies the entire failure of this literary account. Again, the debate itself about the accuracy of testimony and literary accountability is less important for my argument, as Khoury has courageously confronted these issues in *Gate of the Sun*. It is

not so much that the Elias Khoury of *Children of the Ghetto* sabotages the Palestinian narrative by questioning its truthfulness, but rather that he transforms the Nakba not only into mirrors, but more pervasively into clichés, by his excessive immersion in literature's etiolating and narcissistic inclinations.

Mimicry and Appropriation: *Arabesques*

This intertextual clash between Khoury of 1998 and Khoury of 2016 makes also the dense bulk of intertextual contiguities of the novel, which is the outcome of Khoury's conscious attempt to specifically address the identity of those 48 Palestinians who are Israeli citizens. Here I would like to add another layer in order to further elucidate my argument. The dispute between Adam and Khoury is, after all, a confrontation between two terms that are apparently analogous but which nonetheless differ significantly: mimicry and appropriation. Amos Goldberg has suggested that Adam masquerading as the child of Holocaust survivors is clearly an instance of colonial mimicry, and that the entire novel is in fact a courageous attempt to narrate the Nakba through the language of its perpetrators.[20] Goldberg seems to concur with me when he points out that this attempt might jeopardize the Palestinian national narrative, whose consolidation is one of the great achievements of the Palestinian national struggle. One can sense that although he refers to the Holocaust as a meta-narrative gloom,

Goldberg also addresses here the complex sentiments of resentment found in the novel's preface. For one has to be clear here: Adam blames Khoury for appropriating the Nakba, since he himself is not Palestinian.

In order to differentiate between the act of colonial mimicry and cultural appropriation, we can suggest that in the first the subject engenders and performs the language of his oppressor, whereas in the latter a privileged member of society appropriates attributes of an "inferior," either underprivileged or entirely excluded, member of that or another society. It follows from this that whereas Adam represents a clear example of mimicry, Elias Khoury (the fictive and real) appropriates the Nakba from the Palestinians (albeit for their benefit), an underprivileged group both within the Arab world and outside of it. In addition, Khoury's use of descriptive rather than performative speech hinders his ability to re-enact (*agieren*, act-out) the Palestinian trauma, which represents, according to Freud and LaCapra, an essential step towards its possible resolution (*durcharbeiten*, working-through; LaCapra 1994, 205). Rather than subjecting himself to the fractured ordeal of re-enacting the postcolonial condition, which Gayatri Spivak refers to in German as *darstellen* (acting), Khoury subjugates the subaltern to representation (*vertreten*).[21] Whether as Khoury or as Adam, *Children of the Ghetto* avoids what Homi Bhabha defined as the return of the body: "The opacity of language fails to translate or break through

his [the Turkish immigrant in Germany] silence and 'the body loses its mind in the gesture'. The gesture repeats and the body returns now, shrouded not in silence but eerily untranslated in the racist site of its enunciation" (Bhabha 2000, 163). This is why Raef Zreik draws our attention to a possible deficiency of *Children of the Ghetto*: the growing presence of the storyteller Khoury in the novel at the expense of the novel's aim, which is to render silence (Zreik 2018, 324-325). In colonial mimicry it is not silence, but rather the gestures of languages (and of the body) that cannot be accurately represented in translation.

This is even more apparent in the figure of Adam himself, which relates to the second main intertext of the novel, Anton Shammas' Hebrew-language novel *Arabesques* (1986). I argue that also Adam's case is not entirely one of colonial mimicry because mimicry's performance has to be re-enacted unwittingly, as in the many cases of Mizrahi literary accounts where poets stress their immersion in and inclination for Western canonical figures such as J.S. Bach (Ben Yehuda 2017). This is why appropriation could also apply to an underprivileged entity who knowingly addresses and partakes in the attributes of the privileged, of which there are many clear examples in the manifestations of "Shoah envy" prevalent in Israeli literature (Ben Yehuda 2018, 263). The fact that the underprivileged is aware of his appropriation disqualifies his performance as mimicry.

The case of *Arabesques* is one of the most provocative examples of colonial mimicry because its extraordinary sophistication seems to hint at self-awareness but is actually based on complete – and unwitting – immersion in the cultural gestures of the privileged. This is possible because *Arabesques* was a daring confrontation with postmodernism and paratextual structures within the almost formalistic discipline of Hebrew literature, which is a project devoted entirely to championing the new sophisticated, enlightened and secular Jew. Many of the critics discussed Shammas' literary achievement as the shaping of an Israeli identity and "un-Jewing the Hebrew language"[22] but did not pay attention to the simple fact that Shammas just participated in a grand (and very nationalistic) process of un-Jewing: the creation of the new secular Jew, whose merits are based on his ostensibly western sophistication.[23]

Like *Gate of the Sun* and *Children of the Ghetto*, *Arabesques* shares many of the traits I examine here. It portrays the split identity of a narrator who shares the author's name and collides with the identity of an Israeli Jewish author in what seems to project the literary reception of a schizophrenic identity among the participants of a writers' workshop in Iowa City (Shammas 1986, 130). Moreover, the identity of this narrator, Anton Shammas (hereafter "Anton 1"; unlike Khoury he never signs his full name), is fractured again into two additional figures: "Anton 2," a relative of the narrator who died in infancy

a generation earlier (in the thirties; the narrator's birth, like Adam Dannoun and Elias Khoury, coincided with the Nakba: Dannoun and Khoury in 1948 and Shammas in 1950) and shares his name, and another possibly lost baby by the name of Michael (Michel) Abiad ("Anton 3"), born in Lebanon and raised first in Haifa and then in the United States.[24] The end of this convoluted genealogy in the very last pages of *Arabesques*, sets the stage, as it were, for what will become *Children of the Ghetto:* Michael Abiad meets the narrator in Iowa City, and gives him his notes for a sort of autobiography of himself as Anton ("Anton 3" who is being raised by Almza, the mother of the deceased Anton, "Anton 2"), merged with the elderly baby-Anton (same "Anton 2"), and together with details from the life of the younger Anton ("Anton 3," the narrator), following Abiad's decision to incorporate these three persona into one text (Ibid., 233-234). The narrator should now finish the work of preparing the text, just like Khoury will do with Adam's notes. Abiad/Shammas concludes with a complete rejection of a single authorship, endorsing instead the idea that the sole author of the story, the story of a people, is the people. He (they) first entitles it "my story," and then "the story," finally quoting Borges in a complete abandonment of the possibility of knowing whose story is it (234).

Like *Gate of the Sun, Arabesques* addresses the gray zone, where Palestinians took advantage of the 1948 war to rob their brethren (107), or in confronting power rela-

tions between Muslim and Christian communities (with again, special focus on Sabra and Shatila; 206-209). It also relates to the generation of the 1948 refugees themselves (like Yunes or Um Hassan) and their stories that bind many stories together "as refugees tend to do" (138). In fact, this very view of history, testimonies and stories, relates specifically to the book's narratological complexity, which stems from its main form, the arabesque. Hence the genealogies of stories, reliable and fictitious alike, stem from the narrator's uncle Youssef, who (like Michael Abiad) deposits them with him (203-204).

Children of the Ghetto mentions *Arabesques* explicitly in the context of Adam's most convoluted theorization of his approach to literature (Khoury 2016, 150-151, 161), which sums up many of the themes of authorship and identity: he confesses that when reading a "beautiful text" he immediately believes he is his author, and that while opposing the word "I" ("god forbid"), he always finds himself in other stories, as if a human being is a mirror for other human beings and a story for other stories (Ibid.). Careful scrutiny reveals that even the unfinished story of the mute poet al-Yaman which represents Adam's failed fictional attempt to address the Palestinian cause, as well as Khoury's preoccupation with the issue of Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, was formed in *Arabesques*. Here is a prefiguration of al-Yaman's case/coffin, astonishingly by the words of Bar-On, the He-

brew writer who serves as a sort of alter ego to the narrator:

> I'll write about the loneliness of the Palestinian Arab Israeli, which is the greatest loneliness of all… Now it's coming to me – a possible opening line for the first chapter: "Having come to Jerusalem from his village in the Galilee, he learned that, like the coffin, the loneliness of the Arab has room enough in it for only one person" (Shammas 1989, 93; Shammas 1986, 84).

Children of the Ghetto focuses on that particular identity which requires Hebrew alongside Arabic. In its dedication to Anton Shammas, the novel conflates his r*aison d'être* not only with the Holocaust (in the sub plot about Adam and his parents), but mainly with a writer whose single novel, *Arabesques*, exemplifies one of the greatest achievements in the Hebrew language in its amalgamation of all its registers, from Biblical Hebrew until the modern Hebrew current at the time of its publication.

The identity of Palestinian Israelis has been explored many times in Israeli literature, not only in A.B Yehoshua's *The Lover*, which *Arabesques* addresses directly while criticizing its patronizing standpoint (Gluzman 2004, 327-329), but also by two prominent Mizrahi writers, both born in Baghdad: Sami Michael's *Refuge* (Hassut, 1977) and Shimon Balas' *A Locked Room* (Heder Na'ul, 1980). Although both writers are Jews who immigrated

to Palestine, they too, like Shammas and Adam Dannoun, relinquished their mother tongue Arabic for the Hebrew language, which they mastered as refugees within a dominant settler-colonial culture. Both novels depict the complex relationship of the Arab intellectual with the Israeli communist left, with its blindness and latent racism. In Michael's novel, that mimicry of the Palestinian intellectual (in this case the poet Fathi, based on the figure of Samīh al-Qāsim) is juxtaposed with the figure of Murdoch, a tormented Mizrahi immigrant from Baghdad, in what becomes a confrontation between Israeli traumas. An array of identities informs the colonial mimicry of the novel which unravel the gray zone of the many intricacies within the Arab community, whether embodied in the figure of Fathi, who, according to his fellow Fuad (himself a Palestinian with Israeli citizenship and a member of the Communist Party), composes his national poems only in order to flatter the nations of the world and to attract left-wing Jewish women (Michael 1977, 174-177), or of Wassfi, another Palestinian Israeli who, together with Fathi, visits a Palestinian refugee camp under Israeli rule outside the 1967 border and chauvinistically regards the local Palestinians as inferiors who deserve to live under occupation (Ibid., 43). The common assumption they share is that their interlocutor is alienated from his own people, and perhaps even exploits their suffering. And then there is Murdoch, the Arab-Jew, whose traumatic past in the Iraqi jail has left him with a repressed sexuality which fills him with feel-

ings of shame, degradation and inferiority with regard to his Ashkenazi wife who is still in love with the Ashkenazi lover of her youth. Next to this theater of race and desires, Adam's colonial mimicry pales into insignificance, and indeed, his performance is unfailingly flawless, especially with his Jewish lover Dalia. While both *Refuge* and *A Locked Room* depict manifestations of physical violence towards Arabs in Israeli society, interactions with Israeli police and racial profiling (the other, and very dangerous component of mimicry) of encounters in everyday life (on the street, in the bus etc.; ibid., 268; Balas 1980, 66), Adam's story tells of great suffering, especially the suffering of his childhood and of the generation before him, but describes very little of his own ordeals as an adult.[25] Adam's mimicry therefore, is more of a formalistic symbol than the acting-out of trauma, and should be addressed as a form of appropriation.

Bialik's Mirrors and the Postcolonial Subject

As intimated, while I do read Khoury in the original, I readily acknowledge the limits of my acquaintance with Arabic letters, which undoubtedly inhibits my understanding of such a complex work. But the challenge presented by *Children of the Ghetto* requires serious consideration, and it should be examined from the point of view of its destination which is Hebrew, Israeli and, more broadly, Holocaust literature.[26] *Arabesques* bears a daring intertextual relation to H.N. Bialik's famous ars-poetic

poem "The Pool," in which an adult speaker confronts the world of artistic representation by returning to his youth, when walking alone in the midst of nature, he discovers the reflection of his face in a secluded, almost sacred pool. Here, "the riddle of two worlds" is presented: the world outside the pool and the world inside the pool (of mimesis), which shapes the speaker as a poet, the one who deciphers "the language of mirrors" (also translated as "the language of visions"). Gluzman shows how Shammas politicizes this moment by rendering the two worlds (of art and reality) synonymous with the worlds of Hebrew-Jewish culture and of Arab culture, because the pool in *Arabesques* is nothing other than Bialik's pool, the sanctity of Hebrew nationalism, which Shammas is able to enter (Gluzman 2004, 332).

Although Gluzman focuses on a scene towards the end of the novel, in which some of the writers in the writers' workshop in Iowa City take a trip into the countryside and encounter such a pool, *Arabesques* is suffused throughout with dense intertextual connections with Bialik's poetry right from the start of the novel, and especially with the mythological world of Bialik's youth and *zohar* (the glimmer of light and ecstasy, often depicted by zephyrs and crucial in Jewish mysticism). As with Bialik and Shaul Tchernichvsky, the two most prominent authors of the Hebrew revival period, Shammas' novel is a political endeavor to achieve individuality and childhood for a new nation. Using similar methods, and in

the same Hebrew language, Shammas not only depicts the world of his youth in the Galilee through the idyllic language of mirrors (Bialik's glittering Hebrew), but also draws a parallel between his and his ancestors' story during the second half of the nineteenth century with the story of the Hebrew patriarchs during the very same period, with one difference: he does not use this language to describe the willows of Eastern Europe, but to depict Palestine, that is, the Land of Israel itself, the object of Modern Hebrew's ardent longings in the literature of the Jewish-Zionist revival period. As I have intimated, Shammas's colonial mimicry corresponds directly to Jewish colonial mimicry as such: as with Bialik and Tchernihovsky, merely imagining the possibility that an individual may possess a unique psychology and realm of desires, is a means of westernizing, for both Jew and Arab. As a native, Shammas not only exposes the exilic condition that remain essential to Hebrew literature even after the establishment of the Israeli state (Ibid. 333), but delineates the prospect of fulfilling its primary promise: a vision of a new (sophisticated, secular, western) Jew(Arab) in the Land of Israel(Palestine) at the very moment of national revival.

If only the acting-out of trauma did not sabotage this imaginative vision of the assimilation of the Jew and the Arab into modern times, in rendering them "new." Paco, the Palestinian writer in the Iowa workshop, shatters the idyll of the pool, shared by Shammas and Bar-On (re-

spectively the Palestinian-Israeli and Israeli-Jewish participants in the workshop), and their Hebrew patriarchs, by throwing a can of drink into it. Gluzman interprets this gesture as a failure to speak and participate in the Hebrew language, something that Shammas himself (unlike Paco) clearly succeeded in doing (ibid., 327). But I believe that *Arabesques*' complexity lies precisely in the acting-out of trauma within the sanctuary of the narcissistic play of mimicry. We should keep in mind that *Arabesques* too is a political endeavor that tells the story of the Nakba, something that critics normally tend to overlook. Many critics have failed to draw attention to the fedayeen at the conclusion of the novel, who, like Yunes in *Gate of the Sun*, are regarded as infiltrators in their own homeland. It is precisely through these ruptures in the language of mirrors, a rapture in the national myth conveyed via Bialik in the depiction of the legendary youth with creatures like the rooster al Rassad, or the two babies who are not one and the same, that irony is able to convey history (Ginsburg 2006, 195).[27]

The mirrors of Shammas – his Hebrew and more importantly Zionist-like narrative – represent a remarkable act of reaching out to the other, and perhaps Khoury's signature at the end of his preface can be understood in the same light, notwithstanding its appropriation and decline into narcissistic exhaustion. Perhaps Khoury's signature, like Paco's cane, like Adam's reincarnation of his self-annihilation with fire after the death of Bialik's Arabic translator Rashid Hussein, is precisely that: an

ironic gesture (fractured, cramped, bodily, traumatic) of reaching out, reaching out to history, insisting on a listener. His overwhelming signature not only shatters his own narcissistic pool, but the entire burden of national narratives that have shaped the literary subject as such – Arab, Jew, but most importantly, sophisticated, secular, and "new." And there is another possibility underlying all this. In many ways, *Children of the Ghetto* fails from the outset: the most interesting symmetry of traumas is perhaps not the one between the Holocaust and the Nakba. Rather, the true mirror image is that of the erudite Jewish writer in Arab letters, which since the generation of Michael and Balas (one generation before Shammas and Khoury) has disappeared from the landscape of the Middle East. While there have certainly been many prominent Palestinians to master Hebrew, no Israeli Jew has mastered Arabic to an equivalent level, even after the renaissance in Mizrahi studies over the last thirty years, and no such figure can be expected in years to come. Perhaps, when Paco's cane smashes Bialik's pool, it also does so in the names of the Arab-Jews.

Conclusion

By providing an intertextual analysis, I have sought to shed light on Khoury's current political literary endeavor, and have delineated the collapse of his current effort in the face of the frustration felt by so many in attempting to render the Palestinian narrative of trauma. While his *Gate of the Sun* was able to formulate a plea to the

outside, and critically convey Palestinian suffering, his *Children of the Ghetto* tends to descriptive speech which precludes the possibility of polyphonic prose. *Children of the Ghetto*'s explicit intertext *Arabesques*, the definitive and already classic depiction of the Palestinian Israeli, overwhelmingly represents colonial mimicry, whereas the decorous and over-literary *Children of the Ghetto* sinks into appropriation. While both early novels are engaged with the gray zone, where victims and perpetrators collide, *Children of the Ghetto* succumbs to wonted differentiations. This movement from engagement to isolation reflects how performative speech diminishes, and thus allowing trauma to be unwittingly expressed in the excessive and superfluous, but perhaps also in the very bold act of a signature.

Notes:

1. The author wishes to thank Anton Shammas, Deema Draushee, Islam Dayeh and David Hadar.

2. Shammas outlines his particular perspective as a translator between Hebrew and Arabic and shows that along with the quintessential doubt that undergirds any rendering of pain with words, Hebrew has burdened Palestinian testimony with even more doubt, suspicion and denial which characterize the West's association of Palestinian pain with terrorism (Shammas 2017, 121). . The general exclusion of the Nakba from the "Trauma Genre," which encompasses alongside the Holocaust also Hiroshima, the Armenian Aghed, South African Apartheid, Balkan civil wars, Ireland, Sri Lanka, Guatemala,

Nigeria, and even AIDS, is probably the result of its continuation in the present (what Khoury dubs "mirroring"; Sayigh 2013, 55,57). For a study of *Gate of the Sun* that renders excess (after Said) as part of a thorough historical account of the Arab novel that is anchored in loss see Sacks 2015, 190.

3. In a recent and very interesting discussion between two senior Holocaust scholars, Yehuda Bauer accused Daniel Blatman of antisemitism because of his refusal to condemn the BDS movement. For Bauer, the BDS is latently antisemitic because it advocates the Palestinian right of return, which for Bauer carries connotations of genocide for Israeli Jews (Bauer 2019). I believe that Bauer unwittingly uncovered here that mutual exclusiveness lies behind many of the Israeli left..

4. I am not aware of a comprehensive study of Holocaust memory and clichés (other than a lecture held by Philippe Mesnard in Paris in the summer of 2011 entitled "La mémoire de la Shoah à l'épreuve de quelques clichés") but in terms of Israeli memory there are many critics who discuss the state's exploitation of many aspects of the Holocaust to serve its educational (or perhaps propagandist) and foreign policy ends. In his classic article "The need to Forget" Yehuda Elkana (1988) was perhaps the first major critic to do so.

5. I shall return to Khoury's understanding of "mirroring." See also Paul's discussion of memory in *Gate of the Sun,* which also relates to continuous trauma as a futile form of excess: Paul 2017, 185-186, 190, 193. Paul nonetheless concludes by arguing that the novel "offers a mode of engaging the past that is not paralyzed by it…" (198). That, I contend, was something that was lost in *Children of the Ghetto*.

6. Ibid.: 73. Translation amended, see Khoury, *Children*: 76.

7. Ibid.: 118. Translation amended, see Khoury, *Children*: 123.

8. Italics added. Khoury, *Children*: 269-270; Khoury, *awlad*: 260-262.

9. For "surplus of speech" in *Gate of the Sun* see Razinsky and Goldberg 2019, 69. Many of the themes of *Children of the Ghetto* were explored already in *Yalo* (2002): the tension between the narrator and his protagonist, who himself becomes the writer of his life in many attempts from many different naratological possibilities while elaborating many times on words as a mean of torture (something less direct in *Children of the Ghetto*), but without exhaustion and with a clear objective in writing: reaching out in order to get a decent verdict from his judges.

10. For a thorough reading of *Gate of the Sun* which emphasizes these aspects see Goldberg 2016, 335-358. For a similar reading of *Children of the Ghetto*, which places special emphasis on the relation between Eduard Said's understanding of history and Khoury, see Abu-Remaileh 2018, 295-305. These are all important traits that were certainly timely twenty years ago when *Gate of the Sun* was published.

11. Referring to the Hebrew translation of *Gate of the Sun*, Khoury notes that he felt he wrote the novel in both Hebrew and Arabic because he discovered that the other is the mirror of the self. See Adina Hoffman's critique of these formalistic expressions of comparisons between the victims: Hoffman 2006, 60.

12. The fascination with mirroring began with Khoury's admiration of S. Yizhar's *khirbet khizeh* (1949) for its depicting the Palestinians as a reflection of the Jews, as well as with his admiration for Shamma's *Arabesques* which is perhaps the main intertext for Adam as we shall see. See Levy 2012, 20, 26. For Hever, this mirroring in Yizhar marks narcissism (Hever 2018, 107). See also Sacks' interpretation of mirroring as part of the indebtedness of authorship Khoury's intertextuality manifests, something especially pertinent to *Children of the Ghetto*: Sacks 2015, 166.

13. See also Aghacy's critique of Khoury's monologism: Aghacy 1996, 163-176.

14. On "telling" in Khoury see also Lebor 2008.

15. For more on the shifts to third person in Khalil's speech see Head 2011, 156.

16. Khoury 2006, 336, translation amended; Khoury 1998, 343.

17. For a discussion of *Gate of the Sun*'s antagonistic reception by historians see Goldberg 2016, 5.

18. Khoury 2016, 13. Translation amended, see Khoury 2019, 14.

19. It might also strike the reader that Adam uses here "abawayn," which uses the root for fathers, and not "walidayn" with a more neutral gender. The dual form of the Arabic language is something that Adam also explicitly addresses in his many literary discussions (Abu-Remaileh 2018, 299).

20. Amos Goldberg, "Whose Ghetto is This Anyhow? Some Thoughts on Binational Language," lecture in Ben Gurion University of the Negev, May 2, 2018.

21. In her reading of Marx, Spivak distinguishes between two functions of representation: the one made by a third party, like being represented by a lawyer (*vertreten*), and that which consists of representations on their own behalf, without a third and organizing party (*darstellen*). See Spivak 1995, 30-31

22. The literature on this novel is vast. See Hochberg 2007, 79. For a discussion of this against the backdrop of the Jewish state see Gluzman 2004, 322.

23. This suggests a crucial development of any study of the political implications of both *Arabesques* and *Children of the Ghetto* against the backdrop of Jewish assimilationism and self-hatred, matters that although very prevalent in Jewish Studies in North America, have not received sufficient attention in Israeli criticism. Because the main frame of these phenomena, which generally lead to shattered and tormented figures just like Adam (and perhaps Shammas himself) in Jewish history (like for example the abovementioned Celan), relates to adopting the views of a reference and majority group by a minority group, it seems that the Palestinian case, so interwoven with the Jewish one, also calls for this direction. See for example Gilman 1986, 19.

24. *Arabesques* thus shares *Children of the Ghetto*'s excess in terms of plot, but not in terms of his language which seems less circular and figurative. As I argue, the former was able to reach out and even engage with the Israeli myth.

25. This has also to do with the fact that *Children of the Ghetto: My Name is Adam* is the first part of a trilogy, the second part of which, *Stella Maris*, deals more with Adam's upbringing in Haifa, but I believe, still immersed in telling and describing rather that acting-out.

26. Especially in light of *Stella Maris*, in which an extensive part of the plot takes place on Polish soil, it seems that a thorough investigation of Khoury's ambitious project will have to consist of in depth analysis in the wider frame of Holocaust literature.

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Review of Phi Su's The Border Within Vietnamese Migrants Transforming Ethnic Nationalism in Berlin, Stanford Press, 2022, pp. 226, hardcover ISBN: 9781503630062 ($90), paperback ISBN: 9781503630147 ($28), ebook ISBN: 9781503630154 ($28)

Long T. Bui

The field of postcolonial studies has long been concerned with issues of cultural hybridity, national belonging, and political sovereignty. Phi Hong Su's The Border Within: Vietnamese Migrants Transforming Ethnic Nationalism in Berlin tackles all these weighty matters with a remarkable deftness that bridges divergent interests in decolonization, global migration, with the Cold War. Through richly narrated interviews, the ethnography

focuses on Vietnamese migrants in Berlin, a city once split into a "democratic" West Berlin and "communist" East Berlin. On an intimate yet global scale, it traces the complicated interactions between (northern) economic migrants and (southern) postwar refugees after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Through survivors of the Second Indochina War, Su explores the ongoing ideological battle between a pro-West South Vietnam and a communist North Vietnam.

This groundbreaking sociological project begins with the author's study abroad experience, where she compares the simple joy of meeting another Vietnamese person in Germany to the feeling of being part of a massive refugee community in the United States, where "Little Saigon" ethnic enclaves are highly visible. This spatial and cultural contrast sparks questions about how the geopolitical bifurcations of the Vietnam-American War did not end with the defeat of South by northern forces in 1975. Instead, the author finds that those homeland divisions were transported to places where migrants now live or work.

Introductory chapter 1 begins with the story of Tai, born in a time when Vietnam is under French colonial rule. When the French are defeated by Vietnamese anticolonial forces, this decolonial moment served as a prelude to a bigger fratricidal war in which ethnic Vietnamese fought with one another. Like many formerly colonized

nations in the Global South that fractured into warring territories, Vietnam split into irreconcilable sides, even though parts of it belonged to other Indigenous polities like the Cham. Su mines this complicated history to interpret the worldviews of her subjects in the field.

Post-reunification Vietnam under communist victors sent migrant laborers to eastern bloc territories to help with a labor shortage, while refugees from South Vietnam found sanctuary in West Berlin. Border crossers who come for work developed tense relations with anti-communist forced migrants that left after the collapse of the southern republic. Resettled asylum seekers like Tai encountered contract workers and, rather than develop feelings of national unity, experienced social divides. Potential cultural solidarity via shared ethnicity is broken (and heightened) by perceptions that the northern workers are criminal, cold, and low-class compared to the financially comfortable southern refugees who had benefitted from West Berlin's wealth and naturalization process.

Chapters 2 and 3 highlight identity construction with a battle over cultural authenticity and citizenship. Divergent notions of who is really "Vietnamese" fell into debates over who gets to represent the Vietnamese nation-state. Narratives of good patriotic "loyalists" and bad deceptive "traitors" were reproduced during and after the war. Each side fought to liberate all of Viet-

nam, and this war continues by other means. But the author explains how when the country split in 1954, many northerners fled as refugees to the south to escape communist persecution. Many so-called southerners originally hailed from the north. Under public discourses of friends and enemies, political labels bled into stereotypes that became migrants' frames of reference toward fellow ethnonationals in Germany. Contexts of exit from Vietnam and the reunification of Germany in 1989 influenced the reception of migrants and their community formation. Su explains how the communist internationalism and Third World solidarity by contract workers like Ngoc are contested by of refugees, who believe northerners are gangsters from a corrupt authoritarian regime. These prevailing tropes make it difficult for Germans to accept Vietnamese, but they also make it hard for Vietnamese to trust one another.

Chapters 4 and 5 speaks to divergent forms of cultural capital and community-building. Migrant belonging mapped onto Cold War networks and Vietnamese North/South regionalism. The notion of northerners as law breakers in Germany stems from the economic shock from the fall of the Berlin Wall. Marriage migrants like Lien recognizes a difference between her first and deceased (German) husband and second (Vietnamese) spouse. The sexism that her second lover carried over from Vietnam speaks to gender problems as they overlap the general sense of southerners as honest and mor-

al, closer to Germans. Refugee nationalism rears it head within birthdays, community events, and dinner parties, where the author and others are scrutinized about their allegiances.

Chapters 6 and 7 discuss the battles that take shape even in supposedly neutral religious places. The flying of the South Vietnamese flag at a Buddhist temple sparks heated arguments about the right to display political orientation. During the war, South Vietnam was ruled by a Catholic dictator who trampled on human freedom, but northern migrants to the South were perceived as the nationally faithless ones, since they come from a communist-ruled regime. One of the Su's informants, Hue, even turned away from her temple, disgusted by overt displays of southern pride. Attempts by nuns to mitigate conflict resulted in them being accused to catering to northern monied interests. The temple's space of worship remains segregated along geopolitical lines.

State formation is not defined by the boundaries of the nation-state. Instead, meanings of statehood and nationality are forged by the exchanges among co-ethnics and compatriots within and outside the homeland. As Su observes throughout the book, Vietnamese are not unique in the segmented construction of their imagined communities, since Cubans, Koreans, Scots, and Somalilanders are wandering citizens on a planet where borders do not capture the entangled life worlds of in-

ternational students, visa overstayers, expats, and the undocumented.

We continue to live in a postcolonial world, which pivots around the question of the colonizer and colonized, the powerful and the powerless, the insider and the outsider. With elegant prose and well-theorized empirical findings, this book is fully accessible to a wide reading audience and to scholars of various disciplines. The Border Within is a major text for anyone who wishes to grasp the social forces that delimit postcolonial and diasporic identities. Despite reunification, the decolonial moment for Vietnam never truly materialized, as everyday people in Vietnamese diaspora continue to fight for liberation and freedom in their own separate ways. This important study reveals how nations are made, unmade, and remade with an understanding that the path to independence and freedom is riddled with endless controversy.

Review of Song of The Soil. By Chuden Kabimo (Translated from Nepali by Ajit Baral). Gangtok: Rachna Books, 2021. ISBN: 978-81-89602-15-4. 196 pages. INR 399.

Pema Gyalchen Tamang

The Gorkhaland Movement has been an ongoing struggle in the region of Darjeeling Himalaya. The demand to attain separate statehood, under the Indian Nation, from the state of West Bengal, has taken violent forms in the last five decades, particularly in the 1980s, forever changing the intellectual development and cultural landscape of Darjeeling Himalaya. Apart from this, the people of Darjeeling Himalaya, and the Gorkhaland Movement, have been subjected to misrepresentations. Against imagination, like that of Kiran Desai's novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), that reduces the movement

to a mere regional conflict, comes Chuden Kabimo's *Faatsung* (2019) and its English translation, *Song of the Soil* (2021), by translator Ajit Baral.

Song of the Soil is a story, or rather one of the many untold stories, from Darjeeling Himalaya, that attempts to capture a part of history before it gets forgotten. In the chapter, titled 'Shahid Ram Prasad', we are told Shahid Ram Prasad Tamang's story. His transition from Ram Prasad to a martyr reveals the many faces of the Gorkhaland movement. Like many, Ram Prasad joins the revolution against promises of development: if we have Gorkhaland…Every House will have a swimming pool (Kabino 2021, 147). His actions are governed by the party leaders above him and he blindly follows orders for the greater cause of Gorkhaland. However, Ram Prasad soon realises that the movement was not what he had thought to be (149). The revolution that promised prosperity soon makes Ram Prasad destroy his own village: He first burned down the primary school in his own village….Fires leapt in that village where dreams once blossomed (147-148). The village is swept by famine and Ram Prasad's wife and son long for his return. While Ram Prasad is in the camp participating in the revolution, back at home his son dies of hunger. During clashes between the two factions of the revolution, Ram Prasad is killed and is declared a martyr, while his wife is suggested to have been molested and killed by a faction of the revolutionaries. Through Ram Prasad's

story, Kabimo seeks to ask the readers: who actually was the revolution for?

The two factions are seen struggling for power against each other rather than Gorkhaland. The ones in power, who are seen making treaties and giving commands such as, 'To die for Gorkhaland is a matter of great fortune' (45), do not actually face the repercussions of the revolution. It is the Ram Pradas and Nasims, who had volunteered to fight for their land, who get killed or are left crippled, in the end. Nasim, for instance, spends his life after the revolution, 'breaking rocks at the Relli river' (36). Through characters like Ram Prasad, Norden, Nasim, Surya and so on, Kabimo tells us about hundreds of youths who sacrificed their lives for the cause of Gorkhaland only to see the revolution turning into a ground for political corruption.

Kabimo's fiction documents violence perpetrated from all sides during the agitation. Kabimo showcases the fear of Syarpi (Slang for CRPS, Central Reserve Police Force) that loomed around the region as stories of the violence and exploitation carried out by the Syarpis spread throughout the region. The chapter, titled 'Black Day', seems to fictionalise a real life massacre that took place on 27th July 1986 in Kalimpong, when and where armed forces blindly fired on an unarmed crowd. Throughout the novel violence and death become synonymous to the revolution. The three-year movement for statehood,

the Gorkhaland Movement, in the second half of 1980s led by Subhash Ghising had resulted in 297 deaths with 1164 homes destroyed, and the setting up of DGHC, an administrative setup with limited autonomy under West Bengal. (Shneiderman and Middleton 2018, 13)

In the Chapter titled, 'Dhara 144', an old woman is seen telling Surya; Oh I heard that Dhara 144 has been enforced in the Bazaar…We face water shortage too…I was wondering if we could get a dhara too (Kabimo 2021, 59). The word 'Dhara' in Nepali refers to a section of the Indian Constitution as well as to a water source. When Dhara 144 (Section 144) is imposed in the region during the agitation, the old woman thinks that new water sources were established in town and enquires if she could also access such facilities. Through this small episode Kabimo showcases the underdeveloped state of the region that drives the sentiments of revolution amongst the people of the place. We also see the gap between the urban and the rural in the region. Villages are described to have no paved roads or electricity or hospital. (18) We see a city educated teacher referring to a 'remote' village as 'Kalapani', a place where the British incarcerated freedom fighters during the Indian Independence movement (18). Further more, in the chapter titled, 'A Kidnapping', Kabimo showcases the corruption of government officers in Norden's village: Norden was to go to Class 3 now but he didn't even know how to write his own name. (143) Norden eventually moves

out of the village. Even the narrator seems to move out to the city for education and development.

The anxiety (Middleton 2013, 608-21) of being deemed as foreigners in the Indian Nation state has further motivated the movement. Perhaps, for this reason, a unified identity was adopted for the attainment of a separate state. However, it is interesting to see how Kabimo subverts this identity. In one episode, set during a village wedding, we see conflict between two castes: Our Lepcha brothers, please proceed to the lower field…shehnai party, you too please go there..Chettri group, please come to the upper field (Kabimo 2021, 14). The Lepcha group feeling insulted, leave the venue, vowing never to attend the Chhetri weddings. In another instance, we see Latshering amongst his fellow revolutionaries claiming; The history of this place too is linked with the Lepchas…the Tibetans came and destroyed the written stories of Lepchas (100). This very conflict of who belongs and who does not, creates fractures within the community and, in that, the movement.

Kabimo skillfully uses the theme of memory and the act of remembering to narrate a personal story which, by the end, becomes a very important chronicle of the violence of Chyashi ko Andola (the agitation of '86). The news of the death of the narrator's friend Ripden takes him back to his childhood days. We witness, or rather hear, through the young narrator and his friend,

stories of the revolution. These oral stories passed down reveal a side of the movement that intervenes imaginations created by the likes of Desai. The novel and its well translated English version is one of the first books written on Gorkhaland. With such kind of documentation, through fiction, Kabimo not only intervenes and brings in an insider's perspective but also resists erasure of a very significant part of the history of the region.

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