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Black Transnationalism and the Discourse(s) of Cultural Hybridity: An Introduction

Kameelah L. Martin and Donald M. Shaffer, Jr.

To be and exist as part of the African Diaspora is increasingly synonymous with cultural hybridity. One is simultaneously negotiating multiple cultural and geographic identifiers: African/American, Black/British, African/Arab, a Switzerland national of Botswanan descent, or perhaps like poet Warsan Shire, a Kenyan-born Somali living in the United Kingdom. The question of a national identity, when grappling with the varied stigmas of "blackness," is a vexed one. Indeed, African ancestry, which not only is inclusive of imposed national ties, but also signifies linguistic, religious, and ethnic allegiances, can weave an even more tangled web around hybridity and patriotic loyalties when the site of nationhood also becomes fluid and diverse. "Striving to be both European and African," for instance, "requires some specific forms of double consciousness," Paul Gilroy asserts in the opening lines of *The Black Atlantic* (1). Gilroy further describes the challenge of negotiating multiple identities, particularly when considering the liminality that exists between them or establishing new ways to articulate their continuity (1). It is within the interstices of these seeming mutually exclusive terms (African/American, Afro/Latino, Black/British) that hybrid cultures acquire specialized meaning(s); but for Gilroy, as well as others, this intersectional encounter of cultural identities is a moment fraught with ambiguity, one that signals a "provocative and even oppositional act of political insubordination" (1).

Although it has been more than twenty years since the publication of *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy's theorizing of symbolic transatlantic space(s) continues to resonate with literary scholars and cultural theorists. This special issue of *South Atlantic Review* tackles the question(s) surrounding the African Diaspora and its integration into "(at least) two great cultural assemblages, both of which have mutated through the course of the modern world and formed them and assumed new configurations" (1). Gilroy notes that the discourse about "nationality,

ethnicity, and authenticity, and cultural integrity" during the time in which he was writing were "characteristically modern phenomenon" (2). We have endeavored to compile thoughtful considerations of how such notions have evolved and become transformative to expressions of black "mongrel cultural forms" in twenty-first century literature (2). To echo Gayatri Spivak's salient inquiry, can the transnational subject *speak* within traditional frameworks of the Nation-State that presumes his/her permanent dislocation?[1] Does the *dislocation* of the transnational subject then require a reformulation of the self within the symbolic interspaces between race/ethnicity and national identity? Much of the scholarship of transnationalism has called attention precisely to this problem of dislocation. This is arguably the central complication that transnational figures encounter in literature as they negotiate identities for themselves in the apertures between race and nation. Thus, the transnational figure is often read as a racial cipher to be decoded within the theoretical paradigms of race and culture, thereby providing a conceptual basis for formulating transformed and (re)negotiated self identities.

The scholarship collected here explores how critics, scholars, and authors organize, divide, and clarify the ambiguity surrounding distinctions between and representations of transnational identities and experiences conveyed through a literary perspective. More specifically, this issue on "Black Transnationalism and the Discourse(s) of Cultural Hybridity" is invested in generating criticism that unravels how narratives of black transnationalism—ranging from fiction to poetry to autobiographical narratives of enslavement—unearth complex articulations of multivalent black ontologies. Homi K. Bhabha famously raised the question of transnational subjectivity in his classic theoretical study of cultural hybridity, *The Location of Culture* (1994). As Bhabha and others have shown, the transnational figures occupying these contested sites exist betwixt and between conventional modalities of race and nation. As such, their portrayal articulates the salient meaning(s) that provide the terms for their (re)negotiated identities within these dynamic sites of transnational cultural experience. Building on such scholarship, these essays interrogate the fluidity with which certain socio-conceptual terms used to describe African origins and the inverse, whiteness, inform the racial and ideological boundaries that shape varied manifestations of black cultural hybridity. Some of the literary motifs or themes that straddle the often unstable bifurcation of Western/European culture, African/Black experiences, and the gray areas in between include the following topics: African migration narratives; the discourse of displacement and deracination; the defining of race and nationhood; stories of colonial dislocation or decentering;

the Caribbean as transnational crossroads; individualized accounts of Black Diaspora communities; and, certainly, many other iterations of black transnational experiences.

Within these pages, we ultimately seek to offer cogent analyses of trans-migratory patterns of global citizens who self-identify as "black" and the materiality of said identities that are trafficked through, around, and across borders. In so doing, our authors raise important questions about the theoretical and aesthetic forms that black transnationalist narratives assume. Definitions of who falls within the imaginary boundaries of the African Diaspora (and who wants to) shift from one geography to another, adding more layers of complexity to the illusive concept. Inclusion within a hybrid or hyphenated racial category may be a conscious decision or a default designation based on one's physical appearance. The narratives of black transnationalism examined in this issue function as "provocative" and/or "oppositional" forms of artistic and political expression and demonstrate how the literature of transnationalism vocalizes divergent framings of blackness and insists upon their validation. As the saying goes, nothing is new under the sun. One has seen evidence of this sentiment in the work of Zora Neale Hurston, an early twentieth century transnational black subject. Her ornery essay, "How it Feels to Be Colored Me," expresses a need to authenticate her individual, but no less "colored," identity.[2] Jacque Romain's trans-Caribbean conscious protagonist, Manuel, in *Masters of the Dew* (1941) is another example of such divergent framings of blackness.

Collectively and pervasively, the contributors to this issue engage the generational shift taking place about the usefulness and the limitations of Gilroy's Black Atlantic paradigm, evaluating the conflict between modernity and post-colonialism for people of African descent who exist under conditions in which they must mutually recognize dueling diasporic identities. Claude McKay's *Banjo* (1929) comes to mind as his wayward characters negotiate their diasporic identities in Europe. Gilroy, unintentionally, becomes the central lens through which many of the contributors offer an erudite critique of the phenomenology and politics of black transnational existence, whether imagined in fiction or alluded to in the real lives of writers, that often stands in the face of an unmitigated double (or triple or multiple) consciousness. From the speculative fiction of Helen Oyeyemi and Nalo Hopkinson to the influence of activist writers Franz Fanon, Nicolas Guillén, and Edward Kamau Brathwaite—our contributors unpack literatures of the African Diaspora with a sharp eye toward the politics and cultural acrobats one must perform as a post-colonial (and in the case of Juan Francisco Manzano and Mary Prince, pre-emancipated) subject.

For instance, Diego Millan's essay, "Wit's End: Frantz Fanon, Transnationalism, and the Politics of Black Laughter" identifies an "anti-colonial theory of black laughter" by interrogating references to such in Fanon's oeuvre. He offers an astute interpretation of the power relations and phenomenology of black laughter, which arguably has scholarly implications for broadening the scope for an intellectual understanding of black humor, satire, and parody as a trope of resistance in black transnational literature and culture. Indeed, one's ability to laugh or participate in communal self-criticism akin to George Schuyler's *Black No More* (1931) or Aaron McGruder's *The Boondocks* series produces an alternative mode of social exchange and thus a subtle (or not) mode of resistance to racial oppression.[3] Lesley Feracho returns her readers to the theme of double-consciousness and the various forms it can and must take when applied to the black transnational subject in "Engaging Hybridity: Race, Gender, Nation and the 'Difficult Diasporas' of Nalo Hopkinson's *Salt Roads* and Helen Oyeyemi's *The Opposite House*." She demonstrates how twenty-first century black women writers of the diaspora encourage a theoretical connection between W.E.B. Du Bois and Gilroy's Black Atlantic through their narratives of cultural merging. Can an African writer compose an authentic narrative that queries black Cuban identity within the context of migration to Great Britain, and what are the hazards of doing so? Borrowing from Samantha Pinto's *Difficult Diasporas: The Transnational Feminist Aesthetic of the Black Atlantic* (2013), Feracho calls our attention to the difficulty of diaspora for women of color, urging us to recognize "diaspora as a subversive and liberatory act."

Shifting to Francophone writers of African descent, Rosemary Haskell places a spotlight on the literary corpus of Senegalese writer Fatou Diome. Enthralled by how Diome conveys the "migrant sub-Saharan African perspective" in literature that is being termed *France Noire*, Haskell brings more awareness to a newer, global black literature that is unquestionably transnational as she focuses a critical eye on diasporic identities existing simultaneously on the continent of Africa and in the west. Diome envelops her own life experiences and cultural memories as a transnational subject into her prose fiction, as Haskell poignantly informs us. What Diome's novels achieve, Haskell argues, is revealing the unique set of complexities transnational circulation creates when one moves clockwise from Senegal to the French metropole and back again.

Critically engaging the poetics of sound and its ability to construct a black transnational aesthetic situated in the hybrid, creolized space of the Caribbean, John Hyland explores the oral performance of Edward Kamau Brathwaite's poetry in "Disrupting the Lines: Tuning

in to Edward Kamau Brathwaite's 'Word Making Man.'" Looking specifically at the intertextual poetic discourse between Brathwaite and Cuban poet Nicolas Guillén, Hyland analyzes the formation of a trans-Caribbean black identity that is tied, tangentially, to the Négritude movement. In so doing, Hyland is also careful to tease apart Gilroy's concept of the Black Atlantic and the notion of the Black Diaspora to offer clarity on the discursive difference between the two. This difference becomes even more intelligible when considering Marina Bilbija's contribution, "Diaspora Doubtful: Illegible Middle Eastern Subjects and Geographies in Claude McKay's *Banjo* and Nadifa Mohamed's *Black Mamba Boy*." She reminds us, through a careful deconstruction of McKay and Mohamed, that the "scope and membership of the diaspora differs from one location to another." She argues the illegible African Diasporic subject, Latnah, as depicted in the novels she treats, is faced with an even more tenuous migratory experience when her "blackness" cannot be unquestionably mapped onto the performance of her culture, language, or through her phenotype. Raising new considerations of the displacement and deracination of the African-descended migrant, Bilbija's intervention is timely as few scholars of African Diasporic literatures have engaged what it means to be simultaneously black and Arab, black and Muslim, or black and Jewish, and how such identity markers are made to compete with each other for inclusion within opposing communities.

"Racial Identification, Diaspora Subjectivity, and Black Consciousness in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah and Helen Oyeyemi's Boy, Snow, Bird," by Beauty Bragg is an exposition on when and where the twenty-first century African novel enters the discourse on black consciousness. Bragg calls upon the scholarly community to rethink what it means to be an African writer in the context of a global community of ethnic authors who write in English. Can one write an African novel from the U.S. and it not be considered African American? What does it look like for a Nigerian-born Briton to analyze blackness and its so-called markers through the lens of a traditional American passing narrative? Adichie and Oyeyemi both originate from Nigeria, though varying pathways have lead them, presently, to the United States and England, respectively. Their lived transnational dalliances have led some to question whether contemporary African literature should be defined as texts written by Africans living in Africa.[4] Bragg contends that despite living and writing outside of the African continent, these writers are possessed of a deep-seated consciousness about their own blackness and transnational reach, but also those of other diaspora communities. Diasporic, or Pan-African, awareness and literary intervention is part of what makes "new" African literature (also referred to as

African immigrant literature) of the twenty-first century quite distinct from the writings of the anti-colonial African writers, such as Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, of previous generations. Babacar M'Baye corroborates Bragg's supposition by way of demonstrating how writers and thinkers of the mid-twentieth century were already practicing a type of Pan-African literary consciousness that was heavily influenced by Langston Hughes. He argues, in fact, that Hughes was the leading black transnational and cosmopolitan voice of his generation. M'Baye focuses his attention on Hughes's two autobiographical memoirs, The Big Sea (1940) and I Wonder as I Wander (1956), in conjunction with his involvement with the First World Festival of Black Arts in 1966. M'Baye's essay is aptly titled, "Pan-Africanism, Transnationalism, and Cosmopolitanism in Langston Hughes's Involvement in the First World Festival of Black Arts."

One cannot fully assess the many conversations surrounding the idea and practice of black transnationalism and cultural identity without first considering the largest cause of the black transnational movement and the literature produced in direct response: The Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Nereida Seguro-Rico's essay, "Transnational Identities and the Crisis of Modernity in Juan Francisco Manzano's *Autobiography* and *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave,*" asks us to reconsider Gilroy's centering of enslavement as the heart of modernity and focus instead on the intersections between modernity and the colonial mission "that govern[ed] the conditions" in which slave narratives were produced. Indeed, as Segura-Rico points out, "the modern subject of the black diaspora [holds] the key for understanding how we formulate notions of the self in the interstices between the 'protagonisms' of the West—those privileged self-identities—and the construction of the 'other' vis-à-vis the racial discourse of blackness." Seguro-Rico questions how the act of writing one's own narrative of enslavement captures and records the aurality of the historical moment in which the formerly enslaved assert voice and experience. Contending that penning a slave narrative is at once an imitative practice, she ultimately shows how the act of writing is limited in the way it can reflect the "crisis of the self" and offers a new perspective on how critics can approach the slave narrative genre.

In organizing this special issue, our purpose is to cull together a sampling of the fresh scholarship that treats and transforms notions of global black literatures. The literature of slavery and freedom such as that by Olaudah Equiano, Phillis Wheatley and Manzano were initiated as transnational projects published in England, though the authors were situated in other parts of the Black Atlantic world.[5] Gilroy's Black Atlantic is nothing if not a geographic realm in which black

transnationality occurs. Considering the multilayered politics involved in studying the "grand consequence of [that] historical junction" as we move into the second decade of twenty-first century cultural production, we should recall the axiom that fiction (and we take the liberty to specify literature at large) often tells a truth truer (Gilroy 9). The critical voices and narratives of belonging assembled here weave a colorful tapestry that responds to, corroborates, and at times, moves beyond what Gilroy proffered more than a two decades ago. The discourse(s) of black cultural hybridity continues to be complex, multi-dimensional, and ever evolving. Our special issue captures just a handful of the sentiment and thinking toward present black transnational imaginings, with full expectation that as the literary reach of global black literature expands, so too will our reflections on it.

Notes

1. Here, we make reference to the titular question posed in Spivak's canonical essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?".

2. Hurston originally published her essay in 1928.

3. Aaron McGruder is the creator of the comic strip "The Boondocks," which debuted in 1999. The comic is well known for its use of satire and parody of African American history and culture. There is also an animated series that aired on Cartoon Network.

4. In February of 2016, blogger and University of Botswana student Siyanda Mohutsiwa, published an editorial on OkayAfrica.com concerning the over emphasis and attention giving to African writers who no longer reside in Africa. See, "I'm Done with African Immigrant Literature" at http://www.okayafrica.com/news/im-done-with-african-immigrant-literature/.

5. Here we are referring to Equiano's *Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, published in 1789 and Phillis Wheatley's *Poems on Various Subjects*, which was published in 1773. Though considered part of the African American literary tradition, neither of these editions were published in North America.

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About the Authors

Kameelah L. Martin is Associate Professor of African American Literature at Savannah State University and the author of two monographs, *Conjuring Moments in African American Literature: Women, Spirit Work & Other Such Hoodoo* (2013) and *Envisioning Black Feminist Voodoo Aesthetics: African Spirituality in American Cinema* (2016).

Donald M. Shaffer, Jr. holds a joint appointment to the English Department and the African American Studies Program at Mississippi State University, where he is Associate Professor. His current research focuses on interracialism and identity politics in nineteenth and twentieth-century African American literature. He is the co-editor of *The Construction of Whiteness: An Interdisciplinary Analysis of Race Formation and the Meaning of a White Identity* (2016).

Wit's End: Frantz Fanon, Transnationalism, and the Politics of Black Laughter

Diego A. Millan

"What is fitting is always based on some reason of propriety, as improper deeds lack of propriety or in other words, the ridiculous is based on some failure of reason."

--Anonymous Letter on Tartuffe [1]

"The native knows all this, and laughs to himself every time he spots an allusion to the animal world in the other's words. For he knows that he is not an animal; and it is precisely at this moment he realizes his humanity that he begins to sharpen the weapons with which he will secure its victory."

--Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

In chapter five of *Black Skin, White Masks*, "L'expérience vécue du Noir," Frantz Fanon narrates an experience involving himself, a small child, and the child's mother that confronts him with the inescapability of his Blackness—an experience which Fanon uses as a way to contemplate the incompatibility of Blackness with the western world. The situation centers on the tension produced by the "unfamiliar weight" of the white gaze, distilled in the boy's exclamation, "Look, a Negro!" and Fanon's outspoken resolution of the conflict (62). Interpretations abound. In her reading of the chapter, Sara Ahmed grounds an analysis of how racialization occurs along an axis of fear-induced object relations. She begins with the following epigraph from Fanon:

> "Look, a Negro!" It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. I made a tight smile.
>
> "Look, a Negro!" It was true. It amused me.

> "Look, a Negro!" The circle was drawing a bit tighter. I made no secret of my amusement.
>
> "Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!" Frightened! Frightened! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter had become impossible. (62)

Ahmed focuses on the ways fear structures the political mappings of the scene, recognizing the ocular-centric constructions of race and sociocultural difference in "the surface that surfaces through the encounter" between a subject and that which he or she fears (Ahmed 63). The affective politics of fear produce and sustain the fearing subject's sense of self via a complex set of object relations. These relations highlight the ways new connections between signs generate the object of fear and how "the movement between signs allows others to be attributed with emotional value, as 'being fearsome'" (67). Understanding how fear informs politics, Ahmed goes on, can explain early twenty-first century conflations between Arab and terrorist as that which evokes fear today.

Curiously, although her epigraph ends with Fanon's reference to laughter, Ahmed never alludes to laughter throughout her chapter. While Fanon's repetition of "frightened" certainly justifies her attention to the affective politics of fear, one might just as easily note Fanon's increasingly "tight smile" and the repetition of "amuse" as justifications for an inquiry into the affective politics of Black laughter. Fanon himself underscores the importance of laughter when he confronts the boy's mother and follows his infamous retort – "Kiss the Handsome Negro's ass, madam" – with the declaration "Now one would be able to laugh" (BSWM 86). By privileging the ways in which the affective politics of fear shape space and define bodies, Ahmed eschews how laughter contributes to Fanon's resolution of this widely read conflict. In other words, while fright and fear certainly animate the scene, there is more to be said concerning Fanon's use of laughter. Fanon scholar Lewis Gordon situates this moment as a kind of therapeutic catharsis within a longer trajectory leading towards the pathos of Fanon's tears at the end of the chapter. His reading, however, elides distinctions between laughter and humor, sidestepping any question of laughter's phenomenology and instead offering us an image of laughter that is little more than a coping mechanism en route to greater insights.[2]

Taking up the question of laughter in Fanon's writing directly, this article participates in what Jean Khalfa calls a "renewed flow of critical studies on Fanon" (527). The success of this enlivened return to Fanon

has been due in part to the diversity of scholarship that has emerged, as scholars working from a variety of disciplines and continents turn to Fanon's work for inspiration.[3] Gordon organizes what he calls "several stages" of academic engagement with Fanon as moving "from that of ideological critique to postcolonial anxiety to engagement with his thought" ("Hellish Zone" 5). Concerned less with Fanon's thoughts, work such as Ahmed's and John E. Drabinski's article on shame engages more with how Fanon intersects with discussions of affect. Given Fanon's continued influence over scholars working on questions of Blackness and political life, this article grounds a discussion of Black laughter in Fanon's ideas and delineates a Fanonian theory of laughter. We can glean insights into Fanon's thoughts on laughter by reading momentary references to it across his career. These fragments, when read in concert, provide a stable foundation from which to discern an anti-colonial theory of Black laughter.

Beyond the scope of Fanon studies, an understanding of laughter contributes to conversations concerning Black transnationalism. Laughter induces the type of bodily disarticulation similar to that which characterizes the "transnational turn" in literary studies, in which the amorphous fluidity of the sea becomes "fundamentally a space of dispersion, conjunction, distribution, contingency, heterogeneity, and of intersecting and stratified lines" that constitute a "new spatial order of the modern period" (Boelhower 92-3). It is not because laughter transgresses boundaries constantly or that Fanon—the Martinique-born Afro-Caribbean whose occupations included psychiatrist, writer, and revolutionary—fits readily into a Black transnational framework that I place both together here. It is not even that Fanon's influence has transcended national borders, although all of these reasons stand. Examining laughter offers us the space to think critically about the management of feelings in the Black diaspora as a lived reality in the present, and engaging that present necessitates examining its history within a transnational context.

There are, of course, similarities between the fluidity of the sea and laughter's volatility. Scholars often interpret laughter through its tendency for transgression. For instance, some argue that laughter disrupts the stability of the physical body or provokes moments of manageable, benign social disorder.[4] Yet, despite an acknowledgement of laughter's proclivity to transgress, theorists of laughter simultaneously uphold an Aristotelian laughing animal thesis that maintains laughter as an undeniably human phenomenon, which is to say, for them, some lines remain impassable.[5] Whether as a psychical defense mechanism or self-regulatory social phenomenon, the critical consensus privileges laughter as a sign of a universal human spirit.[6] This belief, however,

postpones a sustained analysis of laughter issuing from subjects for whom access to the category of "Human" remains perpetually deferred, those whose laughter marks them as buffoon, boisterous, and uncivilized.[7] Put differently, what occurs at the impasse in which laughter becomes the simultaneous locus of one's in/Humanity? How do enduring legacies of racism thus inform cultural understandings and practices of laughter?

In pursuing answers to these questions, we can chart the conditions that make something called "Black laughter" even possible. To examine Black laughter in this way means asking, "how it became black?" as Alex Weheliye asks more broadly of Black culture ("Engendering"183). To consider the transnational, and transhistorical, ways in which Blackness is ascribed certain types of laughter is to situate this study of Black laughter within the intellectual, ethical, and political imperatives of Black Studies. Describing the theoretical and political scope of Black Studies, Weheliye writes elsewhere, "In sum, black studies illuminates the essential role that racializing assemblages play in the construction of modern selfhood, works toward the abolition of Man, and advocates the radical reconstruction and decolonization of what it means to be human" (*Habeas Viscus* 4). As some scholars working in Black Studies have illustrated, the development of Western civilization depended on the violent, repeated repudiation of Blackness and of Black subjectivity – observed in both the centuries-long enslavement of Africans and in the continued structural disenfranchisement of Black and other marginalized peoples the world over. A Black transnational perspective, then, offers the necessary foundation for examining laughter's role in securing the boundaries of the Human.

Laughter and the Superiority of Man

Indebted to the Aristotelian premise that laughter is "essentially human," most theories of comedy and laughter produce explanatory models that safeguard the stability of the Human. Consequently, this approach ignores an impasse that occurs when laughter is made the evidence of a subject's supposed inhumanity or of a sub-human status. We know, for instance, that images of laughing "darkeys" have helped extend imperialistic reaches, that performing blackface minstrelsy exteriorized and soothed nineteenth-century working class white anxieties regarding the precariousness of their claims to whiteness, and that slave dealers forced playfulness and laughter out of the enslaved at the auction, yet in their pursuit of universal explanations, most theories of laughter consistently ignore the bulk of these examples.[8] Noting these

erasures from considerations of laughter, however, is not to suggest that simply including these examples would remedy the situation; rather I want to suggest that the exceptions made by theories of laughter give rise to a structure premised on the subordination of Black laughter. To illustrate what I mean, the following section looks at how one theory (superiority) produces a racializing assemblage that devalues and circumscribes Black laughter in order to maintain a particular status quo.

The superiority theory states that laughter signals a laughing subject's feeling of superiority over an object, situation, or person. Most critics trace the superiority theory to ancient Greece – Plato says that Socrates acknowledged laughter at self-ignorance in another or in oneself, and Aristotle associated comedy with the imitation of "lower types" in chapter two of *Poetics*. Yet, a more recognizable articulation of superiority takes shape during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In 1650, Thomas Hobbes associated laughter with a "sudden glory" that precipitates feelings of self-importance attained "by comparison with the infirmities of others, or with our own formerly" (65). Describing the consequences of social hierarchies, the superiority theory upholds a status quo by facilitating an egotistical perspective of one's superiority in the world – a not surprising consequence of an expanding British Empire, which, in turn, benefitted from the traffic in human beings.

Drawing this correlation between superiority and the rise of transatlantic slavery helps explain why the theory reemerges in the early 1700s. Joseph Addison, writing as Mr. Spectator, addresses laughter in one of his many essays. In Spectator No. 47, Mr. Spectator praises Hobbes, paraphrasing the political philosopher's thoughts: "every one [*sic*] diverts himself with some person or other that is below him in point of understanding, and triumphs in the superiority of his genius" (Addison 82). The example he uses to prove this "triumph" is the Dutch "Gaper," which refers to carved heads with gaping mouths that adorn buildings on the streets of the Netherlands. Mr. Spectator describes this gargoyle-like embellishment as "the head of an idiot dressed in a cap and bells . . . gaping in a most immoderate manner" (82). A connection between the superiority theory of laughter and anti-Black superiority emerges when we attend to the sign's broader historical context. Associated with pharmacies and pharmaceuticals, the phenotypic and cultural markers of these carved heads varied, yet they most often resembled a turbaned African Muslim. One apocryphal account suggests that these heads in particular refer to a (possibly quack) doctor's assistant whose first role would be to "draw a crowd to their master's tent by making faces and other antics, and then to entertain in order to allow the medicine man and customers more privacy" (Blakely 56).[9]

Eschewing this history almost entirely, Mr. Spectator instead maintains that simply laughing at the Gapers proves beneficial to the Dutch.

The benefit, I would argue, stems from constant and consistent reminders of Dutch superiority refracted through laughter's superiority. Imagine the Gapers' seemingly innocuous appearance on the streets of the Netherlands. Adorning various buildings, these gaping mouths would appear rather common, passing from noticeable sign to quotidian marker. Their decontextualized ubiquity, perhaps, is what leads Allison Blakely to write, "The use of a human head with mouth agape and tongue sticking out has never been fully explained . . . *For some reason* it became especially popular in the northern Netherlands" (54, emphasis added). Her analysis cannot imagine a possible reason, I think, in part because it remains too rooted within a nationalist framework focused on the Netherlands. After all, one reason for the Gapers' popularity might be that it normalized Dutch superiority over nonwhite bodies toward which the Gapers make reference without requiring much thought. Indeed, the success of laughter as a mode of experiencing superiority lies in generating uninterrogated pleasure removed from any suffering such pleasure might necessitate, an "innocent amusement" whose everyday banality serves to obfuscate insidious forms of violence (Hartman 47). This would make things such as Dutch enslavement and exploitation of Africans springing from northern ports such as Amsterdam and Rotterdam more palatable through architecturally-inspired feelings of superiority. This correlation between superiority and slavery remains absent in Mr. Spectator's analysis of laughter, or is rather violently unspoken in his passing appreciation for Dutch "industry and application" (82).

Thinking about the selective amplification of historical elements over others, what I am talking about here with regard to laughter is an organization of knowledge across borders that shaped a sociocultural understanding of Black laughter. It's no stretch to see how Mr.Spectator justifies his thoughts on laughter along racially biased ideologies. These undertones come to the surface in No. 35, in which Mr. Spectator pursues a distinction between true humor and nonsense. He begins with two fictional genealogies describing the separate lineages of "Humour" and "False Humour." The personification of humor connects each lineage to certain groups of people, and those of the false group, he tells us, would "willingly pass" for the supposed original, but fortunately, descendants of False Humour can be identified by their "loud and excessive laughter" (65). The logic follows, then, that any threat a passing subject poses to the stability of the social order can be defused by attending to his or her "excessive laughter," as such

excessive displays could only pertain to unmannerly, unrefined, and undistinguished members of socially lower classes.

Spectator No. 35 establishes a relationship between the subjective position of laugher and the quality of his or her laughter, shifting the attention away from an internal sense of humor to external manifestations of it. Mr. Spectator writes that False Humor "being entirely void of reason . . . pursues no point, either of morality or instruction, but is ludicrous only for the sake of being so" (65). The pointlessness stands in opposition to the ordered image of society, which Mr. Spectator's rationalization of laughter works so hard to uphold. A tautology takes shape in his writing, then, that reinforces an association between social inferiority, raucous laughter, and irrationality; the correlative, of course, is that there is a socially beneficial, "good" laughter worth safeguarding. Thus, Spectator No. 35 stages the "parallel" invention of what might be called an *Other laughter* (or Black laughter) as a way to ballast the supracultural ubiquity of laughter as the provenance of "Man" (Wynter 43). It is of little surprise that Mr. Spectator's descriptions reduce to all manner of dehumanizing, race-tinged epithets. Mr. Spectator writes, "False Humour differs from the True, as a monkey does from a man" (65). Presented as simile, Mr. Spectator establishes an analogy in which False Humour is like a monkey as True Humour is like a man, aligning animal, primitive not only with that which is not man, but also that which is excessively loud.

As this false humor becomes placeholder for non-Human, so, too, must its techniques; Mr. Spectator says, "apish tricks . . . buffooneries," and a penchant for "mimicry" characterizes false humor. Of course, the western cultural correlation between Blackness, apishness, and primitivism has an enduring history.[10] Addison contributes to this association in producing his classist and racist social commentary. Whether or not he knowingly furthers the association to include an affinity between Blackness and boisterousness matters less than the paradigm it reinforces. The assumed superiority over such boisterousness underwrites the continual positioning of Black laughter as excessive and supports views that perceive excessiveness as threatening to the stability of a status quo.

The management of laughter, then, screens the engineering of a social structure premised on the repudiation of Black laughter. Mr. Spectator's false humorist soon occupies the position of the unwitting anarchist as the need to stabilize the Social engenders unease over potential uprisings. The unrepentant joker seeks to make light of all moments rather than taking care not to "bite the hand that feeds him" (241). Mr. Spectator criticizes those who do not exercise proper restraint over their wit, who ridicule both friend and foe, and who sup-

posedly have no sense of social propriety. In establishing a hierarchy that privileges "the hand that feeds," Mr. Spectator warns those from lower social statuses to exercise not only caution but also deference when making jokes, and positions the humorist, whether false or not, within an inescapable logic. He rationalizes servility, maintaining that those in power remain immune to criticism from those for whom they provide, and justifies regulatory/disciplinary functions to curb potential insurrections that might result from allowing discourteous joking to go on unchecked – important points to stress when one is in the midst of an increasingly globalized economy. Mr. Spectator's caution is thus more concerned with staving the possibility of sincere criticism than with distinguishing among humorists, outlining parameters in which Black laughter's negation sustains a vertical, hierarchical social order.

Within societies structured hierarchically along axes that include race, gender and class, some laughter remains constitutively more suspect and subject to increased surveillance than others. Read in conjunction with Mr. Spectator's more explicitly racial discourse on laughter, No. 35 offers a direct warning to nonwhites – be careful not to laugh out of place or risk disciplinary correction.[11] Legacies framing Black laughter as loud and excessive derive in many ways from these supposedly rational attempts to explain and justify the pleasure of superiority felt from laughing, which is why laughter is only safely pleasurable when it aligns with the interests of a dominant order. Consequently, this relationship establishes the conditions that limit the recognition of Black laughter (from the perspective of the dominant order) as not only loud and excessive but also as unreasonable and as potentially seditious.

Frantz Fanon: Being Derelict

> "I can honestly say that nobody ever thought I was totally incorporable! [Laughter] I'm happy, I do agree with them: I would not incorporate myself either, if I were in their shoes!"
>
> --Sylvia Wynter[12]

If we agree that the stabilization of western orders of knowledge included the marginalization of Black laughter as a way to curb any potentially disruptive capabilities, then we can see how Fanon's rewriting of his relationship to laughter constitutes a necessary component of

his larger anti-colonial project. In what follows, I trace Fanon's engagement with laughter and the ways it grounds significant aspects of his developing theories. The colloquialism wit's end helps ground and organize this analysis, especially when we consider what it means to be at wit's end. Wit, by itself, can refer to a humorous acuity, a jocular insight associated with "intellectual ability; genius, talent, cleverness; mental quickness or sharpness, acumen" (*OED*). The intelligence, or smartness, associated with wit proves helpful in social interactions. Engaging in a battle of wits means entering an exchange that calls attention to the incisive ways a sharp wit also smarts; and in the end, it is usually the sharpest wit that outwits the rest. Given the early modern use of wit as a substitute for penis, colloquialisms that involve taking or seeing one's point—and the broader mode of intellectual exchange to which they gesture—remain steeped in phallocentric constructions of meaning. Furthermore, the preposition at (as in one is at their wit's end) implies a location, or a destination at which one arrives; to say you are at your wit's end implies having vetted all possible solutions. Together, we are left with the understanding that wit's end describes an experience of exasperated frustration.

This frustrated sense expressed by wit's end names the position in which Fanon finds himself during chapter five of *Black Skin, White Masks*. Through his dialectical approach Fanon engages and discards one supposedly valid theory after another, experiencing wit's end as he encounters a limit between Reason and Unreason, or what Lewis Gordon calls Fanon's "metacritical reflection on reason" ("Hellish Zone" 7). Part of that reflection requires Fanon's elaboration of the position of Unreason, or nonsense, within his thinking. Wit's end aligns with the "zone of nonbeing" from which one views the fraying of so-called rational discourse (BSWM 2). As Frank Wilderson and others have argued, Blackness represents that which cannot be incorporated but that nonetheless enables the system of western epistemology to work; Blackness, then, only ever coalesces as *perpetual incongruity* from the vantage point of the west. When the racialized subject recognizes his or her position within this order of knowledge, the resulting awareness of one's status as incongruous/anomalous to the stable image of society generates what Fanon calls the "two frames of reference within which he has had to place himself" (83). The relationship here between Fanon and DuBoisian double consciousness – the "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" –is apparent and well-documented (Souls 11).[13] The question I pursue instead is how we understand laughter when it exposes the incongruous tenets of a so-called rational world. How, to put it differ-

ently, do we interpret Sylvia Wynter's thinking when she says, "nobody ever thought I was totally incorporable," in relation to her transcribed "[Laughter]" ("Proud Flesh")?

We begin with Fanon's representation and thoughts concerning moments of laughter. Evidence of conceptual similarities between Fanon's methodology as a type of strategic humor appear early. In the opening pages of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon writes, "It is good form to introduce a work in psychology with a statement of its methodological point of view. I shall be derelict. I leave methods to the botanists and the mathematicians. There is a point at which methods devour themselves" (5). Parodying the style of other supposedly similar works, Fanon interrupts the pomposity of the first sentence full stop with the second—"I shall be derelict." This curious word holds many meanings. As an adjective, derelict refers to a deplorable or dilapidated condition; it also refers to something (or in Fanon's case someone) forsaken by an owner. As a noun, derelict refers to a person without a home, job, or property. In other words, derelict refers to an individual who renounces multiple stabilizing pillars of civil society such as domestic life, labor for another, and property ownership. Connecting this placeless condition back to laughter, we might understand the constant movement implied as the bodily movements induced by laughter, which enact the "constant motion" Alenka Zupančič says characterizes the comic engine (3). The body reels and gesticulates as it laughs, and in choosing to be derelict, Fanon opts for a discursive register and mode of being that can be said to remain similarly elusive. This perspective affords him the distance necessary to consider Blackness and its status as "outlaw" within the rational world (BSWM 82). As a figure whose movements were transnational, and for whom national affiliation mattered less in comparison to Pan-African alliance, being derelict offered strategic benefits within the struggle for decolonization. "The impulse to take the settler's place implies a tonicity of muscles," Fanon writes of the desire for decolonization in *The Wretched of the Earth* (53). Besides referring to muscular tone and strength, "tonicity" also refers to stress patterns in speech that could be indicative of one's constant laughter. As a term, tonicity bridges the body and speech to an anti-colonial impulse to be read and heard on/through the body. Further, this "impulse" bridges the relationship between the muscular-physical and the cognitive-psychic by gesturing to a psychic tonicity matching the muscular. Laughter thus provides a useful mechanism through which to explore this bridge, especially since *Wretched* marks the moment Fanon's use of laughter grows more explicit in its engagement of the body and its consciousness.[14]

Fanon's pivot from body to mind uses the language of tension and release to describe the psychic processes, mental symptoms, and physical responses of colonized patients' mental disorders. A trained psychiatrist conversant in psychoanalysis, Fanon's thinking in *Wretched* stems from his work with subjects who were living and fighting through the Algerian Revolution. He outlines the results of this work in his chapter "Colonial War and Mental Disorders." Fanon lists such physical symptoms as "stomach ulcers," "menstruation trouble," accelerated heart rate, and "generalized contraction with muscular stiffness" among the "psychiatric symptoms" experienced by the native (291-2). We see how physical symptoms remain necessarily connected to the experience of oppression at the psychic level.

As a way of further bridging the mind/body split, Fanon appeals to interpreting the colonized subject's dreams. A correlation between muscular tension and attendant feelings of stuck-ness results in native dreams regarding "muscular prowess" characterized by "action and aggression" (52). Ventriloquizing a native patient, Fanon writes, "I dream I am jumping, swimming, running, climbing; I dream that I burst out laughing, that I span a river in one stride, or that I am followed by a flood of motorcars which never catch up with me" (52, emphasis added). Laughter might seem at odds with the more active actions listed, but we know already that Fanon emphasizes the physicality in laughing, as the "burst" of laughter calls to mind similar bursts of artillery fire during clashes in the colonies.

This transition from the psychic dimensions of colonialism to one's struggle for decolonization and liberation turns on a moment of laughter. More than symbolizing a colonized subject's desire for power, that burst of laughter pivots between everyday physical actions and superhuman achievement, facilitating a transition that renders the seemingly impossible something always already achieved. The grammar, in translation, anchors this pivot; the use of "or" over "and" emphasizes an unconscious correlation between laughing, spanning a river with one stride, and outrunning a "flood of motorcars" that renders each action synonymous. Also, the verb tense shift from gerunds in the first independent clause to declaratives in the second enacts a rhetorical "burst" of its own. The final tense shift to the present perfect – in the case of "I am followed" – connotes the indeterminacy of unspecified time, as if to say the work of decolonization remains ongoing and indefinite. Whereas Fanon interprets the laughter through a Freudian lens of tension and release, he necessarily differs from Freud in terms of what that release entails. Whereas Freud argues that laughter operates as an individual release that ushers the subject's return to a state of equilibrium (or what we might otherwise call Reason) from a momen-

tary encounter with an epistemic crisis (Unreason), Fanon's laughter, instead, signals one's ongoing identification with the epistemic crisis.

This identification manifests as one's antithetical stance to all manifestations of colonial violence. For instance, in Fanon's description of Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) member Djamila Bouhired in *Toward the African Revolution* (1964) we see how certain modes of laughter remain incomprehensible to agents of the State. Bouhired was tried in July 1957 and sentenced to death for her participation in a café bombing that resulted in eleven deaths. Reports suggest that she laughed at her sentencing, to which Fanon alludes, "Djamila Bouhired's laughter on hearing the announcement of her death sentence is neither sterile bravado nor unconsciousness—let there be no misunderstanding as to this. That smile is rather the quiet manifestation of an inner certainty that has remained unshakable" (*Toward* 73). Rather than delimit precisely what Bouhired's laughter means, Fanon imagines the contours of her laughter by telling us what Bouhired's laughter is not—"neither sterile bravado nor unconsciousness." When Fanon writes, "let there be no misunderstanding," he addresses how Bouhired's laughter courts misinterpretation. Laughter as "bravado," or audacity, emphasizes an attempt to project hyper self-awareness as defense; laughter appears as a front masking insecurities or as a lack of substance, neither of which in Fanon's estimation describes Bouhired. "Unconsciousness," on the other hand, implies that her laughter reveals some general imbecility or misunderstanding of her situation and silences her conscious decision to take part in the bombing. Either misinterpretation has its appeal. After all, to identify with the actual reason for her laughter would mean identifying with its heresy, which in this case would mean supporting anti-colonial resistance; it proves easier to ascribe alternate interpretations to her laughter than share her unmistakable belief in the justness of her actions.

Bouhired's laughter parallels her legal council's (Jacques Vergès) now famous *dèfense de rupture* or "rupture defense," which attempts to disrupt court proceeding by challenging the logic upon which the case is being tried. Instead of claiming her innocence, Vergès acknowledges Bouhired's actions and places them within the context of resistance to France's violent presence in Algeria, challenging the State to consider its ability to remain objective and still pursue a legitimate case against Bouhired. The result precipitated an impasse between the court's fidelity and Bouhired's fidelity to their respective stances upon the same action. Vergès, perhaps fond of summing up the logic of his strategy, recounts the story of Bouhired's laughter and the judge's response: "Don't laugh miss, this is serious!" (qtd. in Lambert "#Law///Jaques").

Lèopold Lambert rightly observes that her "laughter is the most dramatic evidence of the impossibility of a dialogue between the accuser and the accused" ("#Law///Jaques"). Laughing in the face of her fate, Bouhired embodies the essence of Vergès's defense and regards the status of the court as nonsense. Returning to the episode with which we began, I will show how Fanon stages his own identification with Unreason as an eruption of laughter: "Since no agreement was possible on the level of reason, I threw myself back toward unreason" (93).

You will remember how a child's exclamation -- "Look, a Negro!" -- produces a crisis of subjectivity. Fanon writes, "I made a tight smile . . . 'Look! A Negro!' the circle was drawing a bit tighter. I made no secret of my amusement" (84). At last, Fanon admits, "I made up my mind to *laugh* myself to tears, but *laughter* had become impossible" (84, emphasis added). This prohibition of laughter can be read as an inability to produce sound outside of a racialized matrix of meaning. Fanon's reluctance (and/or inability) to laugh has to do with his recognition of the "legends, stories, history, and above all *historicity*" circumscribing his subjective position, in particular with the ways in which Black laughter has been tethered to constructed myths of primitivism and inferiority that "[have] woven [him] out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories" that include "tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial-defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: 'Sho' good eatin'" (84-5). The repetition of "above all" emphasizes the importance of this last element in this longer list. Lewis Gordon changes the last bit of Markmann's translation back to Fanon's original "Y a bon banania" (Peau Noire 90). According to Gordon, the reference is to a popular breakfast cereal, Banania, which features a caricatured Senegalese soldier depicted on the box to sell the product. Bonhomme Banania and his "so-called 'African French'" slogan debuted in 1917; over time the advertisement came to "[resemble] a smiling monkey wearing a fez" ("Through the Zone" 17). Gordon introduces his translation decision with an awkward joke: "The Markmann translation ended this passage with "Sho' good eatin'" to signify a breakfast cereal" (17).

At a time without Google, however, the racism and caricature suggested by "*Y a bon banania*" would have appeared out of context and much harder for many of Markmann's non-Francophone readers to comprehend. The translation does not aim to "signify a breakfast cereal" as much as draw attention to a history of using dialect in caricatured depictions of Blackness. This use of dialect in English stands in for the very issues of consumption that Fanon puts forward with his reference to Banania in a way that would register with an American, Anglophone audience. Both highlight the commercialization of Black amusement to promote the consumption of products whose manu-

facture is based upon the consumption of Black bodies vis-à-vis Black labor. The smiling or laughing face is coopted into a system of racial capitalism that both erases the labor of Black people and closes a circuit of production in which this erasure performs its own form of cultural work—like the "Gapers" beckoning to potential customers, the static image amplifies the constitutive sense of superiority that made it possible in the first place.

As the only quoted element in Fanon's list, the phrase draws further attention to the ways in which Black speech can be made to participate in white supremacist mappings of Blackness – much in the way Banania as an abstraction furthers the original extraction of labor in the colonies. The representation of affected dialect speech (in both English and French) stands in for a broad assortment of white dominant representations of Blackness, most notably rural dialect speech and the minstrel performances that made use of it. The implication is that any laughter accompanying these representations invariably justifies a Black subject's supposed inferiority as both ancillary and complementary. Indeed, speaking at all risks giving credence to this dialectic, as one enters a sonic soundscape constructed by the white gaze. As Fanon smiles at this blunt child on the train, the tightening of his lips suggests one thought: keep your mouth shut.

Fanon often attends to the ways in which sound and listening abut ocular-centric constructions of meaning. In *A Dying Colonialism* (1959), Fanon's description of an exchange during an examination between a colonial doctor and a "native" patient highlights both the visual and audible elements concerning their interaction. When confronted by the linguistic, cultural, social, political, and economic impasse created by the "colonial situation," the doctor turns to the colonized body for diagnostic purposes (126). The "contracted" muscles of a colonized body yield nothing, having become "equally rigid" (126). Despite the doctor's inability to gather information visually, the encounter serves a didactic purpose for the reader, as Fanon underscores the importance of listening. Speaking in terms of sound and listening, he writes, "One must, of course, lend an ear to the observations made by the European doctors . . . But one must also hear those of the patients themselves when they left the hospital" (127). Symbolically, Fanon's depiction of the doctor underscores how the racialization in medical diagnoses hides behind words such as "protopathic" – a reference to the nerve stimuli of the skin that are only capable of broad, coarse discrimination; the implication, from the perspective of the doctor, is that the patient's illness stems from a real or imagined relationship between his skin and the outside world. The patient's humorous, pithy comment exposes the doctor's verbosity by comparison: "They asked me

what was wrong with me, as if I were the doctor; they think they're smart and they aren't even able to tell where I feel pain" (127). As with Bouhired's laughter, Fanon requires his audience to attune their auditory understanding and reorient their spatial relationship to colonialism away from the sanitized hospital. After all, to hear the words of the patient one must step outside of the examination room, exit the symbolic site of sterile knowledge and reimagine their perspective on the situation. Fanon's implicit criticism of ocularcentrism succeeds, then, by restructuring his audience's relationship to the auditory dynamics organizing the scene.

Fanon's retort to the woman on the train in *L'expérience vécue du Noir* requires a similar shift in auditory perception. The chapter calls attention to the importance of laughter insofar as Fanon represents himself moving from an inability to laugh to finally staking a claim on laughter through the following declaration, here presented in its original French and the two official English translations:

> — Regarde, il est beau, ce nègre...
>
> — Le beau nègre vous emmerde, madame!
>
> La honte lui orna le visage. Enfin j'étais libéré de ma rumination. Du même coup, je réalisais deux choses : j'identifiais mes ennemis et je créais du scandale. Comblé. On allait pouvoir s'amuser. (Peau 92)

> "Look how handsome that Negro is! . . ."
>
> "Kiss the handsome Negro's ass, madame!"
>
> Shame flooded her face. At last I was set free from my rumination. At the same time I accomplished two things: I identified my enemies and I made a scene. A grand slam. Now one would be able to laugh. (BSWM 86, emphasis added)

> "Look how handsome that Negro is."
>
> "The handsome Negro says, 'Fuck you,' madame."
>
> Her face colored with shame. At last I was freed from my rumination. I realized two things at once: I had identified the

> enemy and created a scandal. Overjoyed. We could now have some fun. (Philcox 94, emphasis added).

Fanon tells us he has accomplished two things through his response, *j'identifiais mes ennemis et je créais du scandale*: he identifies his enemies and he "[makes] a scene."[15] Yet, the assurance, "Now one would be able to laugh," appears as proof positive, suggesting that his action has accomplished something else. Fanon recognizes a possibility for his laughter where it had been impossible; but how can he, and by extension we, be certain? His declaration is surprising, as he provides no attempted laughter from which to draw this conclusion. In fact, there is very little about the scene that would suggest the more traditional mechanisms of comedy and very little to identify as laughable. Indeed, there is no proof of laughter's possibility until we have reevaluated our conceptions of laughter to understand his retort itself as a mode of laughter, one that evinces its performativity. When Fanon says, "Le beau nègre vous emmerde, madame" he performs the "subversive laughter" Wynter says belongs to "all the rogues/fools/clowns that ever brought the priestly forms of 'high seriousness' down to earth" ("After Humanism" 55). The grounding moment here is the result of Fanon announcing explicitly the very problem of ontology in relation to Blackness, though this gets somewhat lost among available translations. Markmann's translation substitutes a euphemistic "kiss [my] ass" for the French "vous emmerde" while Richard Philcox comes closer in his translation: "The handsome Negro says, 'Fuck you,' madame." Yet, what this more literal translation makes up for in terms of accuracy it misses in nuance. There are no quotation marks around the French to justify Philcox's decision, and it is not so much what one "says" but what one does. This distinction between saying and doing is crucial when one considers the significance Fanon places on being "actional" as a mode of self-inscription grounded in the actions of the body (119).

Black laughter affords Fanon a mode of articulation that is not beholden to ocular-centric, sensorial constructions of knowledge production; the perception of laughter (visually on the body, aurally through one's hearing, or even haptically as felt vibrations) does not account for all cognitive and subjective dynamics made possible by the disruptive structure introduced by laughter. At the limit of what is knowable, Black laughter precipitates an epistemic crisis, compelling us to rethink what we mean when we say "laughter." The indefinite, unknowable shape of Black laughter proves its most valuable asset, denying any type of definitive reformulation and reconstruction of its derelict movement. This is the insight that Fanon brings forward through

this retrospective identification of Black laughter in *Black Skin, White Masks* and throughout his work.

Lastly, consider how the presence of laughter in Fanon's writing correlates to his increased work within anti-colonial movements, which is to say with an increased attention to the transnational. While the internal struggle had in dreams might be the psychic ground upon which some individual battles are waged, Fanon is clear throughout much of his work that anti-colonial struggle and decolonization only ever works as collective activity. Pseudo-releases of internal aggressions only benefit the individual, obscuring the ongoing oppressions of colonialism. As an alternative, Fanon lauds the "African institution" of "communal self- criticism," which settled quarrels between members of the same group or community (*Wretched* 48). This collective act, which he writes is always done "with a note of humor" generates an atmosphere in which "everybody is relaxed" (48). As such, this communal self-criticism operates along the lines of laughter and produces an alternative mode of social exchange. By designating this mode an "African institution," Fanon flouts the national boundaries separating people, envisioning a Black transnational network premised on the power of laughter.

Notes

1. According to translator Ruby Cohn, Molière probably wrote the letter himself.

2. Gordon writes, "That Fanon concludes [the chapter] by confessing that he wept reveals the therapeutic dimension of the chapter. Recall his reference to laughter. Laughter enabled him to cope with his situation, to move on. The role of humor in oppressed communities is well known. There is not only the form of humor in which the oppressor is ridiculed, but there is also self-deprecating humor, humor that creates a paradoxical distance and closeness with their situation" ("Through the Zone" 19).

3. See also *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation* (1996; edited by Alan Read) for thorough discussions concerning Fanon's influence on art-making practices.

4. Bakhtín, 1965; Parvulescu, 2010. McGraw, 2014.

5. Recent studies by Marina Davila-Ross consider whether animals, in particular primates, laugh. Her findings (2009; 2015) suggest that distinctly human facets related to laughter are "traceable to characteristics of shared ancestors with great apes." By tickling rodents, Jaak Panksepp (2007) hopes to someday map neurological pathways associated with emotion. The tenor of these studies, however, presupposes a definition of human laughter that is unambiguous.

6. Freud, 1916, and Bergson, 1900.

7. I follow Rinaldo Walcott's example here of capitalizing Human when it refers to "its post-Columbus orientation," which is to say the Human as a technology and consequence of imperialism. Similarly, I use a lower-case when discussing being human in modes that attempt to either disrupt or move beyond Europe's definitions (Walcott 93).

8. Silver, Andrew. *Minstrelsy and Murder: The Crisis of Southern Humor 1835-1925*. LSUP, 2006, p. 172; Lott, Eric. *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*. Oxford UP, 1995; and Hartman, Saidiya. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. Oxford UP, 1997.

9. For more on Gapers and their apocryphal histories, see Allison Blakely's *Blacks in the Dutch World: The Evolution of Racial Imagery in a Modern Society*. Indiana UP, 2001. In particular, see pp. 54-57.

10. In 1758, Dutch anatomist and anatomical illustrator of the mid-eighteenth century Petrus Camper performed a public dissection of an Angolan boy to disprove "that Negroes and the Blacks had originated from white people's intercourse with large Apes or Orang Utans" (Camper qtd. in Meijer 39). Meijer, Miriam Claude. "Cranial Varieties in the Human and Orangutan Species," in *The Invention of "Race": Scientific and Popular Representations*. Edited by Nicolas Bancel, Thomas David, and Dominic Thomas. Routledge, 2014. An article published in 2008 revealed "how this association influences study participants' basic cognitive processes and significantly alters their judgments in criminal justice contexts" (292). See Phillip Atiba Goff, Melissa J. Williams, Jennifer L. Eberhardt, and Matthew Christian Jackson. "Not Yet Human: Implicit Knowledge, Historical Dehumanization, and Contemporary Consequences." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* vol. 94, no. 2, 2008, pp. 292–306. Note, too, that simian imagery was used in Victorian England to dehumanize Irish populations. For examples, see Curtis, L.P. *Apes and Angels: Irishman in Victorian Caricature*. David and Charles P, 1971.

11. Sylvia Wynter makes a similar point when she considers how the need for the stereotype of the "'rebellious' Nat" functions to "[legitimate] the use of force as a necessary mechanism for ensuring regular steady labor" ("Sambo and Minstrels" 151).

12. "Proud Flesh Inter/Views: Sylvia Wynter."

13. See Henry, Paget. "Africana Phenomenology: Its Philosophical Implications." *The C.L.R. James Journal*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2005, pp. 79-112; Moore, T. Owens. "A Fanonian Perspective on Double Consciousness." *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 35, no. 6, July 2005, pp. 751-762; Rabaka, Reiland. "Introduction: The Five Forms of Fanonism: Deconstructing and Reconstructing Africana Studies, Radical Politics, and Critical Social Theory in the Anti-imperialist Interests of the Wretched of the Earth." *Forms of Fanonism: Frantz Fanon's Critical Theory and the Dialectics of Decolonization*. Lexington Books, 2010, pp. 1-48.

14. Scholars in more cognition-centered fields have recently sought to test this connection.Evolutionary psychologist Robin Dunbar, in his paper correlating increased pain thresholds with increased laughter, argues in favor of laughter's physical benefits over its cognitive benefits. Dunbar, R.I.M. "Social laughter is correlated with an elevated pain threshold." *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London Series B, Biological Sciences*, 2012, pp. 279, 1161–1167. See also Dunbar, R.I.M. "Bridging the bonding gap: the transition from primates to humans" *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London Series B, Biological Sciences*, 2012, pp. 367, 1837–1846.

15. Note the similarities between Markmann's translation here and Constance Farrington's translation of the colonized subjects' initial moves toward decolonization in *Wretched*: "the native identifies his enemy and recognizes all his misfortunes, throwing all the exacerbated might of his hate and anger into this new channel" (71).

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About the Author

Diego A. Millan is a Presidential Diversity Postdoctoral Fellow at Brown University's Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women. His research gathers at the intersections of Black studies, Humor studies, performance studies, sound studies and affect. He is currently working on his first book, tentatively titled *Laughter's Fury*, which examines how enduring legacies of racism inform social and cultural understandings and practices of laughter. This research has been supported by grants from the Social Science Research Council and the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation. He has published in *Studies in American Humor* and *PMLA*.

Engaging Hybridity: Race, Gender, Nation and the "Difficult Diasporas" of Nalo Hopkinson's *Salt Roads* and Helen Oyeyemi's *The Opposite House*

Lesley Feracho

An understanding of the (re)constructions of identity must take into account the complex negotiations of a myriad of discourses, including but going beyond race, class and gender. For individuals and communities of the African Diaspora these identitarian processes are part of the subject's navigation of historical, economic, political, and cultural contexts that include the experiences of and responses to displacement, social hierarchies, and hegemonic discourses in the New World, while finding strategies of survival, adaptation, mobilization, and resistance. As part of an analysis of this displacement and the forms of adaptation and transformation it elicits, scholars of the African Diaspora have reevaluated and expanded their definitions of the concept itself. As Jana Braziel notes, while diaspora addresses questions of migration and displacement, contemporary articulations have moved away from essentialist notions of homeland, national or ethnic identity, and geographical location to its conceptualizations in terms of hybridity, *métissage* or heterogeneity (6, 8). Despite these important distinctions, however, it is because of diaspora's connection to hybridity as well as to movement that its relationship to transnationalism in the contemporary global world has become a point of analysis.

While on one hand transnationalism represents a movement of people, ideas, goods and capital across national borders that "undermines nationality and nationalism as discrete categories of identification, economic organization and political constitution," the crossing of these sites does not necessarily herald the end of the nation (Westwood 8). For Sallie Westwood, transnationalism takes into consideration two processes: national definition and "cross-border migration" which are made up of "radicalized, gendered and class relations which are by no means static, not least because of the ways in which individuals and collectivities contest certain boundaries and carve out new spaces of identity and control for themselves" (2).

A fuller comprehension, therefore, of the reconstructions of identity and agency in new geographical spaces contained in the concept of the transnational must account for the persistent political, historical and affective significance of national identities that Westwood identifies. This is also true of the constant reconfigurations of multiple discourses of race, class, and gender that she highlights as part of border crossing and national identity. By placing diaspora and transnationalism in dialogue, as Braziel notes, we expand the terms of engagement of both and present "an alternative paradigm for national (or multinational, transnational and even post national) identification" (8).

In considering conditions of marginalization and displacement within the African Diaspora, and the ways in which the movement of black subjects in a transnational context can reflect displacement as well as opportunities of transformation and contestation; the relationship between the various points of the Diaspora, specifically Africa and Europe, can provide important context for an understanding of the historical discourses of power (political, economic) that have shaped the representation and realities of black subjects and the myriad strategies they have adopted to challenge them. In this essay, I apply theories of multiple intersections of identity and form in Black women's writing to explore how the narratives of two writers from the Caribbean and Europe (by way of Nigeria) respectively, Nalo Hopkinson and Helen Oyeyemi, address these issues. Through their texts, *The Salt Roads* (2004) and *The Opposite House* (2007), both women question and reconfigure the relationship of race, specifically blackness, and gender to the representations and intersections of African and European identity by creating and problematizing the discursive and symbolic networks of contestation and empowerment that connect the diasporic and transnational.

Historically, the relationship of Africa and Europe has been one of opposition and division with underlying relations of property and power whereby "Europeans have perceived Africans and Asians both as permanent children and as people without any individual, natal, or hereditary rights for centuries" (Hondius 3). As Paul Gilroy has noted in his analysis of the constructed dichotomy of blackness and Western discourse, "Striving to be both European and black requires some specific forms of double consciousness" (1). Despite these historical, culturally, and politically divisive concepts of the Other, however, the realities of the colonial experience negotiated between separation and hybridity, whereby black subjects were able to find and create spaces in which to navigate, contest and at times subvert these colonial discourses of subordination, challenging the division of Africa and Europe. In the process they constructed multiple black identities that explored

the points of intersection and possible fluidities between the two. As Manning Marable has noted, "Blackness acquires its full revolutionary potential as a social site for resistance only within transnational and Pan-African contexts" (3). It is therefore through the recognition of these links (at times marked by the violence of imperialism and social and political inequalities) that a diasporic identity as a site of power and change can exist.

For Africans and their descendants in the New World, this process of negotiation of black identity, on an individual and collective level, has engaged cultural hybridity as one strategy. For example, Stuart Hall defines the diaspora experience "not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of identity which lives in and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity" (402). Similarly, Kobena Mercer points to a diasporic "critical dialogism" that challenges "the monologic exclusivity on which dominant versions of national identity and collective belonging are based" (257).

One means of articulating the intersections and transformations of identity on the individual and collective level, as they navigate different historical, economic, political, and cultural contexts across national boundaries and within the African diaspora, has been through the creative prism of fiction. Samantha Pinto points to the role of Black women's writing in particular in elucidating the myriad crossings of diaspora as a subversive and emancipatory act. Through the concept of the "difficult diaspora," Pinto highlights the texts by women of the Black Atlantic that are "the aesthetic and critical terrains that imagine the feminist potential for occupying diaspora's very form itself, the transgressive and often unexpected loops of circulation that cannot easily be traced to fixed points of origin and return" (4). In twenty-first century representations of diasporic identity, Black women writers have continued to use narrative experimentation to reconstruct individual and collective identities in ways that highlight the intersections of diasporic and transnational border crossings. For these writers, these textual and geographic migrations also provide strategies to contest hegemonic discourses of race, gender and national identity while creating spaces for empowering cultural alliances. My focus, therefore, on two Black women writers draws on the necessity of contextualizing these discourses within a fuller framework of identity. As Michelle M. Wright states, a consideration of categories of gender and sexuality must accompany that of race: "it is only when we see Black subjectivities produced through . . . these categories do we arrive at theories . . . that successfully negotiate the ideal and material formations that must predicate Black subject formation" (6-7).

It is important to note the complexity of blackness as understood in the Caribbean and European contexts where issues of phenotype, socio-economic factors and the political environment all contribute to a complex range of racial identifiers. For the purposes of this essay, however, I include in this category subjects who have suffered "personal indignities and adverse discrimination due to their skin color or known Black African ancestry, regardless of census categories," as Allison Blakely has noted in her study of Afro-Europe (3).

In Hopkinson's *The Salt Roads,* the use of the loa Ezili to journey through time and memory, connecting in particular Europe (Paris), Africa (Egypt), and the Caribbean (Saint Domingue), exposes anxieties of displacement and loss, yet negotiates historical, cultural, and political discourses that reveal the dual function of cultural hybridities: as strategies of opposition to hegemonic discourses and as a foundation for black women's alliances. For both Hopkinson and Oyeyemi, however, these strategies are presented alongside an awareness of the problematics and complexities of these cultural hybridities. In Oyeyemi's *The Opposite House,* the British-Nigerian writer parallels the experiences of an Afro-Cuban protagonist living in London with the Afro-Cuban Orisha Yemayá to provide the foundations for a rearticulation of a hybrid cultural identity that challenges the displacements of the African diaspora while examining the complex contemporary articulations of multicultural Europe through alternate identitarian and cultural connections.

Through an analysis of how Africa, Europe, and the Caribbean are linked in these texts both writers create examples of Pinto's "difficult diasporas": border crossings, hybrid forms, and decenterings that explore women's experiences of oppression and dislocation and create counterhegemonic discourses of race, gender and sexuality. The result is the development of discursive and symbolic networks of resistance and agency through complex diasporic and transnational alliances connecting these three sites between the Old and New Worlds while also reflecting on the difficulties of this process. One of the ways in which these alliances are created and function is through the use of syncretic spiritual practices as a means of evoking and developing a cultural memory connecting the present with the past. Cultural memory, as Jan Assman notes, is a society's cultural continuity obtained through the preservation of knowledge "rendering it possible for later generations to reconstruct their cultural identity. When we speak about cultural memory, we are including . . . the role of spirituality as a form of resistance" (cited in Rodriguez and Fortier 1).

Just as Carol Marsh-Lockett and Elizabeth West emphasize in a study of literary expressions of African spirituality, the cosmology and

survival instincts rooted in memory that enslaved Africans brought to the New World left a "distinct philosophical and cultural imprint throughout the African diaspora" (1). For Black artists such as the women writers I will focus on in this essay, Paul Gilroy's question, "How do black expressive cultures practice remembrance?" becomes an important one (212). As Karla Holloway observes, the act of remembrance in the literary text for Black women writers can be a powerful tool for excluded female voices to recover and tell their own stories, countering Western historiographies and hegemonic structures of silence and erasure. At the same time both cultural memory and (re) memory can reveal the anxieties of displacement while providing tools for black subjects to negotiate cultural, historical, and political contexts and the discourses of power at work within them. The act of telling these stories and understanding black women's writing and experiences is not only about intersections of multiple discourses, but also about journeys existing in multiple places and times, part of what Carole Boyce Davies describes as "migratory subjectivities" wherein "Black female subjectivity asserts agency as it crosses the borders, journeys, migrates and so re-claims as it reasserts" (36-7). For these writers, such crossings allow them to explore the forces of marginalization and strategies of contestation on a variety of planes – negotiating the physical and psychological, the structural and temporal.

In both Hopkinson and Oyeyemi's texts these navigations occur through a combination of historical themes of Black women's realist fiction with the innovations and possibilities of what can be better described with the more expansive label of speculative fiction. This symbolic and discursive production of "difficult diasporas" interacts with Afro-descendant spiritual practices as a means of exploring strategies of preservation, resistance, and transformation through the links of memory and the spiritual. Through the representation of physical, psychological, and temporal border crossings both works create hybrid forms that confront and counter historical, cultural, and political marginalization. The result is a rearticulation of a cultural identity that challenges the displacements of the African diaspora while creating alternate identitarian and cultural connections with Africa, Europe, and the Caribbean. As Jacqui Alexander notes in *Pedagogies of Crossing* (2006), this linking of personal experience and the social with the spiritual opens up new avenues of feminist interpretation regarding the epistemological. It changes our understanding of the spiritual from solely cultural retention and survival to that of memory's relationship to the continuation of spiritual practices in the face of trauma.[1]

Hopkinson is a Jamaican-born, Canadian resident who crosses the boundaries of identity and both realist and speculative fiction by com-

bining Caribbean cultural referents and practices like dialects, stories, and proverbs. In the historical fantasy, *The Salt Roads,* the author uses "Afro-Caribbean spirituality as a device to look at the lives of women from the past, linking them in order to explore issues of ownership, identity, spirituality, and sexuality for women of African descent" (Hopkinson, "Afrofuturism" 104). Her novel, in itself, exemplifies the fluidity of Boyce Davies' migratory subjectivities through navigations that reflect Pinto's "difficult diasporas." For example, Hopkinson's text crosses space and time and joins prose with poetry in sections of varying lengths with titles like, "Beat/ Soul/ Word/ Slide/ Chain/ Break /Water/ Blood/ Jazz and Riff." This narrative journey is divided among three women: Mer – an enslaved midwife and healer on the Saint Domingue plantation Sacre Couer in the years prior to the Haitian Revolution of 1791; Jeanne Duval – the French mulatta mistress of Charles Baudelaire in 1842 Paris; and Thais – a young woman sold into slavery and prostitution living in Alexandria, Egypt in 345 B.C. All are connected by a Voudoun goddess (or loa) Ezili.[2] I will focus primarily on the crossing of Ezili into the bodies of Jeanne and Thais as a representation of the spiritual journeys through time and memory that link Africa and Europe. Through these journeys Hopkinson represents temporal and symbolic hybrid spaces and identities that destabilize the colonial legacies and hierarchies of Africa and Europe while also positing, through Ezili's interactions with Mer, a Caribbean hybrid space that engages, challenges and disrupts these divisions. These spiritual and temporal connections allow Hopkinson to revisit the past in order to highlight black women's creations of community and strategies for combatting the marginalizations due to patriarchy and colonial legacies.[3]

In her negotiation of Yoruba spiritual worldviews and the freedoms of speculative fiction, Hopkinson's crossings are represented as journeys through the temporal realm connected by cultural memory and (re)memory. Ezili, the Voudoun Goddess of love that connects the three protagonists, corresponds to the Erzulie family of spirits or loa: that is, Haitian-born spirits who represent the colonial histories and experiences of black women in Haiti and throughout the Caribbean.[4] Through her various incantations, Ezili encompasses and embodies "a memory of slavery, intimacy and revenge . . . as the record of and habitation for women's experiences in the New World" (Dayan 41, 47). She is a loa of multiplicities and contradictions that subverts binary oppositions—whether it be of gender distinction, sexuality, color division, or her character.[5] For most ethnographers her many representations include Erzulie–Freda, representing love and luxury; Erzulie-Dantor, a passionate figure associated with the Catholic figure Mater Salvatoris; and Erzulie–gé-rouge, a red-eyed militant enacting vengeance.[6] Yet, in

the spirit of her constant slippage of categories she has also been described as Ezilie Danto, the warrior goddess who inhabited the African priest Boukman and initiated the Haitian Revolution.[7] In *The Salt Roads*, however, Ezili is also represented in the form of Lasirèn, the loa of ocean and fresh waters, who rules the sea often in the form of a siren or mermaid.[8] While known to bring wealth or even luck, within the novel Lasirèn is a conduit for Ezili to communicate with the protagonists. In particular, during her revelation to Mer she laments the fractured connection between the enslaved peoples in Sacre Coeur and their African ancestors. She charges Mer with restoring these pathways of memory and survival, represented by the symbol of the salt roads, which also serve as a means of travel for Ezili.[9] Ezili is born at the moment of the death of an infant aboard a slave ship en route to Saint Domingue within the world of the novel. As the narrative progresses she becomes the embodiment of the concept of common ground and solidarity in the midst of exploitation.

Throughout the novel Ezili mounts or possesses the three women at different moments in their lives, acquiring through her memories of each experience a new consciousness that propels her toward a self-awareness as an adult woman.[10] With each moment Ezili recounts and processes the pleasure and pain she and her female hosts feel as they negotiate gender, race, class, and sexuality in different historical periods that are nonetheless connected by the struggles of African descendants against social hierarchies and hegemonies. Yet these movements facilitated by the Afro-descended spiritual beliefs are also tools for re-creations of the self, creating what Vanessa K. Valdés has described as "more full images of womanhood" that counter and at times subvert limiting notions of Western patriarchal discourse (165).

Typographically Ezili's narration is written in bold print to distinguish her from Jeanne, Mer, and Thais/Meritet. As she observes:

> I'm born from mourning and sorrow and three women's tearful voices. I'm born from countless journeys chained tight in the bellies of ships . . . Not for me the progression in a straight line from earliest to latest. Time eddies. I am now then, now there, sometimes simultaneously. (Hopkinson *Salt* 40, 42)

Although Ezili jumps back and forth between the three women, it is with Jeanne Duval in nineteenth-century Paris that she returns most often. Such narration joins memory, presence, and absence, as evidenced by Ezili's reflections on inhabiting the body of a female enslaved African: "A branding sear of heat crazes my thigh . . . Irons hold

me, I can't control my direction. I roll about, caught in a myriad memories of dark shipspace slotted in berths too narrow to let me move far" (42).

In the midst of conditions of oppression, Ezili's non-linear, temporal movements link present and past experiences and cultural practices that provide strategies of resistance through (re)membering as articulations of survival and the creation of community. As Ezili states, "Most times, I live in Jeanne, and learn her life . . . There are times when ginger-coloured Jeanne's mind holds me loosely, and my consciousness travels; to where, I am not sure" (93).

With the representations of Jeanne Duval (also known as Prosper) in Paris alongside Baudelaire; Thais (later called Meritet); and Mer, on the plantation in Saint Domingue, alongside the figure of Francois Makandal, Hopkinson's narrative of the time-traveling Haitian loa interweaves fact and fiction. She thus creates a text with key elements of historiographic metafiction that, according to Linda Hutcheon, "shows fiction to be historically conditioned and history to be discursively structured, and in the process manages to broaden the debate about the ideological implications of the Foucaldian conjunction of power and knowledge" (120). Hopkinson's use of historiographic metafiction allows her to reframe and critique history through an African diasporic-centered narration while also acknowledging the key roles of Africana women in all their complexity. The blurred lines of history and fiction subvert the power dynamics that the privileging of one (history) as an authentic, incontrovertible record implies, by questioning whose voice is privileged to tell the truth, rescuing from erasure black women's complex voices.[11] In Hopkinson's text, these voices are African, European, Caribbean, both separately and together, centering narratively the oftentimes marginalized black female subjects in each of these societies.

For each historical subject represented, Hopkinson incorporates elements that challenge and subvert the factual accounts of their lives, presenting an alternate reality that recognizes their importance which, in some cases, are missing from the historical record. Thais, for example, in a case where legend and fact were already blurred, is recorded as a "harlot" from the fourth century A.D. who is only later regarded by the monk Paphnutius and the Catholic Church as Saint Mary of Egypt, the "dusky" patron saint of sailors and prostitutes, after contritely consenting to be cloistered in a monastery, acknowledging her unworthiness as a sinner until her death.[12] In Hopkinson's text, however, Thais is a young woman who journeys to the desert to reflect on the losses in her life and seek independence. There she encounters a holy man who

mistakenly declares that she is Saint Mary of Egypt, despite her rejection of any shame at the life she has led.

Along with Hopkinson's weaving together of fact and fiction, Ezili's connection with Jeanne represents a symbolic linking of Europe and the Caribbean, juxtaposing the anxieties and marginalizations of black women in colonial society with the possibilities of empowerment that alliances between them can provide. One way in which Hopkinson highlights Jeanne's anxieties is through her struggles negotiating the gender and racial norms she faces in nineteenth-century Paris. Despite the social position received through her relationship with Baudelaire, her inclusion in society has its limits as demonstrated by the opposition of Baudelaire's mother, Baudelaire's own exoticization of her, and the attitudes of the larger society. In one telling moment after she has been inhabited by Ezili, Jeanne hums a tune her grandmother sang, which turns into a sensual and liberating dance: "Jeanne is helping me too, unawares; by humming . . . That tune is how her grandmother entreats her gods. Jeanne is hoping that she might call on them too; ask them what her future holds if she stays with Charles" (Hopkinson, *Salt* 116).

What is intended as a spiritual entreaty to her ancestors and a way for Jeanne and Ezili to be free, is instead misread by Baudelaire as eroticism for his pleasure, making her and Ezili aware of the continued exoticization of the black female body: "Charles' face, shocked, is even whiter than its usual pallour . . . That dance; what was it? . . . You've never done anything like that on stage! So wonderfully lewd!" (124-5). For Jeanne in particular, this moment of release and her attempt at connection is curtailed by the historical, cultural confines of European society, leaving her frustrated and drained by her continued oppression: "She felt heavy. Dragged down . . . It hadn't worked. Still more of this life for her" (125).

However, despite the constant reminders of the limits society places on her, Jeanne's journey to greater agency is in part achieved through being possessed by Ezili. While at times this possession illuminates the tension between the privileges of her social status and her continued objectification, as the novel progresses it also becomes the key to her increasing agency within Parisian society and greater resistance to the hegemonic discourses that would confine her. It is here that Hopkinson emphasizes Ezili as the symbol of the syncretic Afro-Caribbean spiritual practice that travels back to the metropole in order to provide alternate models of relation between it and the colony, challenging colonial dynamics of power. Such subversion, with its liberatory promise for Jeanne, further emphasizes Ezili as a symbol of resistance enacted through her "constant fragmentation and differing of the self . . . in-

habiting the bodies in diverse contexts" (Marinkova 191). Over the fluid time of her multiple journeys, Ezili's desires to help Jeanne achieve the emancipatory promise that her embodiment increasingly presents, despite the continued pressures to submit to societal norms, slowly bears fruit. It results in Jeanne's rebirth, agency, and sense of community in new relationships with her lover Achille (Moustique) and with Georgine, the daughter of Lise, who she is entrusted to raise and who teaches her to write.

The intertwining discourses of race, class, gender, and sexuality in the representation of Jeanne, and later Thais and Mer, demonstrate the multiplicity of black female subjectivities and the ways in which they can challenge fixed discourses of identity and power. For example, Ezili's inhabiting of black and white bodies, placed alongside the fluidity of sexuality in lesbian relationships such as that of Mer and Tipingee and Jeanne and Lise, serve as a counter to dominant heteronormativity. As Dayan notes, the loa's practices demonstrate:

> a suspension between the supposedly antithetical constructions of masculinity and femininity. Erzulie is not androgynous . . . The indeterminacy of the goddess, whose libido wanders between women and men, enacts a fantasy of *l'amoreuse*, a play that is ever determined by precise sociocultural models. (43)

Whether under the weight of Parisian society, where neither Jeanne's identity as a mulatta nor her relationship with Baudelaire completely shield her from marginalization as a black woman, or in the Egyptian societies where women like Thais were part of the sex industry, or in the colonial plantation society that Mer navigates, Ezili's interactions with each woman also create complex possibilities for solidarity.[13] For example, while both Jeanne and Mer undergo extreme physical and psychological trauma and violence (as in Jeanne's syphilis contracted from Baudelaire or Mer's tongue being removed following her battle with Makandal), both end their difficult journeys allied with other women in service of community. In Mer's case, instead of pursuing an opportunity to be free by joining a maroon community, she and her lover Tipingee stay on the plantation in order to serve as midwives and healers for enslaved women. They assist in the birth of, among others, a baby girl named Dedée Bazile, also known as Defilée, who grows up to be one of the heroines of the Haitian revolution.

Through their interactions Hopkinson symbolically creates frameworks for alliances that challenge dominant models throughout the Americas. As these temporal, geographical navigations highlight the

relationship of Africa, Europe, and the Caribbean as sites created in part out of the violent colonial meetings of the Old and New Worlds, Ezili's journeys counter this violence by establishing spaces of solidarity with other women of the Americas. This is exemplified in her union with the free Haitian women who march in Port au Prince in order to "defy the blan law that tells us that coloured women must go barefoot" (Hopkinson, *Salt* 309). Together they chant, "nou led, nou là . . . we're *ugly but we're here*," to demonstrate the power of counterhegemonic strategies in the face of othering (309-310).

While Ezili's time spent with Jeanne symbolizes the link between Europe and the New World and the hybrid space created to contest the limiting discourses of race, patriarchy, and class that impact black women, her connections also challenge the representation of the African experience, as exemplified by her relationship with Thais. Here too, Ezili's embodiment of this African subject, juxtaposed with Europe and the Caribbean (through her jumps to Jeanne and Mer), reconfigure the representation of race and gender to create multiple discursive and symbolic paths of identity as illustrated by Thais's embodiment of the profane and sacred. Similar to Jeanne and Mer, Thais, who is sold by her parents into prostitution in Egypt, is subject to societal discourses of gender and race that present her as disempowered object, and initially only able to secure any power through her sexualization. However, similar to Ezili and Jeanne, Thais's connection with the loa becomes the key to the young woman's gradual empowerment, exemplifying a similar multiplicity seen in Ezili, by subverting binary discourses of sexuality and purity.

It is here that Ezili represents a syncretic Afro-Caribbean practice that travels back to the Old World (4th century northeast Africa) in order to provide alternate models of relation between Africa and Europe and create a different dynamic of power and heritage. When inhabited by the loa, Thais is also allied with Mer and Jeanne, thus symbolizing the Old World African subject who is empowered by these connections to the "other" within the European Old World and the new hybrid Caribbean space:

> they are a sour slave woman . . . a vain girl with soft, black hair . . . a ginger-haired woman, drunk on smoke and sex . . . : "Welcome sister," say the three voices, whispering . . . For each woman has echoes of herself, all around her . . . branching and dividing endlessly. (Hopkinson, *Salt* 304)

Ezili's embodiment of Thais slowly incites the young Egyptian woman to find ways to continue to develop her selfhood. She actively removes

herself from the space where she was marginalized and exploited by travelling to the desert – only to find herself in an even more geographically marginalized space (unprotected in a desert cave). Like Jeanne's suffering before she embarks on a journey of self-awareness, Thais's greater agency comes after pain, demonstrated by her physical and psychological torment at the miscarriage of her pregnancy. As she observes: "There'd been too much noise around me, and I couldn't hear . . . But if the baby's gone, why do I still feel like someone's living in me?" (342-343). Through this physical and emotional pain, Thais forms bonds (unknowingly) with Ezili that enable her to find an alternate, transcendent mode of being where she can reflect and listen to the different voices speaking to her. As a symbol of this change and a sign of her rebirth, Thais renames herself Meritet. As Ezili notes: "This young Meritet who holds me in her is learning to listen, and I along with her . . ." (378). In the end Meritet is able to find peace, to accept the loss of her child, and move on: "I'll bury it tonight. I'm grown now. It's time to let it go" (388).

Through the illumination that her time of reflection and communion with voices like Ezili's has given her, the encounter with the monk Zozimus opens up for Meritet a path to a dual, seemingly contradictory construction as sinner and saint, juxtaposing the prostitute Thais's redemption with that of the gypsy Saint Mary. As she notes with surprise, her new identity will be invented by the monk to spread abroad, as "a pious Christian saint, repentant of her wanton ways, expiring as she achieved the pinnacle of her holiness" (392). At this stage in her journey Meritet is able to reconstruct her identity as a woman who has achieved a greater sense of independence and subjecthood, refusing to be constrained by the societal norms and codes of behavior while ironically allowing the monk to construct a parallel version of her persona as a paragon of virtue.

Through a representation of the spiritual and temporal, Ezili's union with each woman reflects the fluidity of African *cosmovisions*, joined with what Emma Pérez calls a "diaspora subjectivity" that "is always in movement, disrupting, recreating and mobile in its representation, converging the past with the present for a new future" (79).[14] At the same time, Hopkinson combines these temporal crossings linking African-descended communities with the stories of the myriad geographical movements in which these women engage. For example, Ezili's union with Jeanne that then leads her to Mer connects Paris and (what would become) Haiti while her wanderings from Thais to "climb into a bus alongside a tired working woman whose feet hurt" leads to a woman we can identify as Rosa Parks, thus connecting Egypt and Alabama (Hopkinson, *Salt* 306).

Ezili symbolizes the linking of the diasporic and the transnational, highlighting women's movements across national borders and the communities they fight to create. As part of this communal consciousness, her returns to Jeanne or wanderings throughout the ether continually symbolize this desire of the individual joined to the collective: "Each eddy into which I fall immerses me into another story, another person's head . . . I splash in joined tributaries of lives, watery webs that connect each one's story to each" (208, 213). The female loa's journeys through time are especially significant when we draw on the multiple meanings of water that connect the experiences of the pain and displacement of the Middle Passage with its significance as fluidity, as pointed out by scholars such as Gilroy in his description of the Atlantic as a single unit producing a transnational, intercultural perspective.[15]

One can also see the hybrid communities symbolically created in these spaces as challenges to the colonial hierarchies and legacies of these three sites (Africa, Europe, and the Caribbean), destabilizing discourses of identity and power. Despite Ezili's emphasis on the power of alliances, as represented by her embodiments of groups such as the LGBTQ community of Stonewall, her journeys across time make her aware of the anxieties and fears of impotence in the face of the marginalization of the people of the diaspora, those she calls the Ginen: "Time has no past or future for me, just an eternal now. But like a human I am now trapped in 'had been.' I thought I had learned my task. I had met myselves, had learned that I must fracture in order to fight" (Hopkinson, *Salt* 322). It is important to note Ezili's use of the past tense here, a clear representation of her articulation of a diasporic experience as a memory, of an overwhelming sense of the scope of oppression and the tense interplay of fragmentation and union that would serve as strategies for empowerment.

Ultimately Ezili's disordering of temporal logic, backward and forward in time and memory in the ether, exemplifies Pinto's "difficult diasporas" by creating "the transgressive and often unexpected loops of circulation" and by demonstrating the complexity of hybridity in representing the violent divisions and possibilities of destabilization of the Old and New Worlds, while affirming the collective as a force of resistance (4). Hopkinson writes: "We are all here, all the powers of the Ginen lives for all the centuries that they have been in existence, and we all fight . . . We are a little different in each place that the Ginen have come to rest, and any one . . . is already many powers" (387).

With Oyeyemi's *The Opposite House*, I briefly examine how the author creates and critiques the alternate spaces of empowerment where Africa, Europe, and the Caribbean meet through the representation of crossings and hybridities with the orisha Yemaya. These migra-

tions and intersections serve multiple functions, three of which I highlight here. On one hand they represent, as Helen Cousins observes, "a critique of contemporary multiculturalism in Europe under the name of 'diversity' that has the capacity to reproduce imperial knowledge of the Other" (14). On the other, they serve as a parallel exploration of the importance of hybrid African diasporan religious practice in reshaping women's personal, historical, and cultural identities.[16] Lastly, through the movements between the Caribbean, Europe and, symbolically, Africa, Oyeyemi explores migration and its impact on the intersection of diasporan and transnational contexts.

Born in Nigeria but raised in Britain, Oyeyemi is the author of five novels that explore cultural dislocation and migration and hybrid identities. She highlights the power of stories to persuade or deceive through the incorporation of a variety of genres and narrative techniques that reference Yoruba spirituality, legends, myths, and fairytales. In *The Opposite House*, inspired and titled after the Emily Dickinson poem, "There's been a Death in the Opposite House," she creates a novel described as "a thought experiment where the author imagines the journey, not of the slaves themselves, but of their gods" (Cooper 109). This journey that separates and intersects realist and allegorical narratives, focuses on two female protagonists struggling to reconcile their anxieties of identity, heightened by physical and cultural dislocation, the loss of memory and home, and the pressures of assimilation.

Oyeyemi disorders her story by decentering each protagonist's concept of their identity. Told in linear form is the story of Maja, a bilingual black Cuban-born singer who now lives in London. As she deals with an unexpected pregnancy and the clashes with her mother, a practicing devotee of Santería, she searches to understand her Afro-Cuban heritage and position as an immigrant in multicultural Britain. Through the second protagonist, Yemaya, the Yoruba deity of the ocean and maternity (who is referred to in the novel by the new name Aya) Oyeyemi more explicitly connects African diasporic cultural practices as a disturbance of dominant historical and identitarian narratives. She recounts Aya's story in the "somewherehouse" – an unstable space where the Orishas exist between Lagos and London and which, for Cousins, symbolically exposes the undercurrent of mainstream integration in multiculturalist discourse.[17] As the narrator notes at the beginning of the novel:

> A somewherehouse is a brittle tower of worn brick and cedar wood. The basement's back walls hold two doors. One door takes Yemaya straight out into London and the ragged hum of a city after dark. The other door opens out onto the striped flag

> and cooking-smell cheer of that tattered jester, Lagos-always . . . floridly day. (1)

Oyeyemi's representation of her protagonists' journeys of place and identity are the foundation for her scrutiny of multiple African diasporic experiences, namely the tensions of displacement, remembering, and forgetting. This complex relationship between migrations and displacements is represented by Aya's anxiety between Old and New Worlds and Maja's anxiety between Afro-Cuban and British multicultural identity. As Cousins observes, "The dual narratives suggest that there is indeed an irretrievable loss at work in the diaspora community represented by Maja's notion of 'my Cuba' –an imagined rather than remembered version of her birth place; Chabella's Santería worship; and the deterioration of the 'somewherehouse' and its inhabitants" (8).

For Maja, the question of the possibilities of individual and collective empowerment stem from her experience and that of her mother, Chabella, for whom Santería provides both a cultural, almost utopic connection to Cuba and Africa, and a contestatory identity to assimilationist discourses in multicultural Britain. Although both parents fled Cuba as political exiles, Maja's father's response was to move to a country where he felt free, both politically and spiritually. For him, his wife's beliefs are not a connection to a homeland, but a deterrent to accepting cultural and political realities: "Spirituality doesn't protest injustice, it just bears it" (Oyeyemi 207).

The choice of the orisha Yemaya as the counter to Maja's sense of displacement and multiple identities during her pending motherhood is also appropriate given the deity's association with reproduction, gestation, nurturing, and also fluidity. [18] As Toyin Falola and Salimar Otero note in their study of Yemoja (her original name): "Like the sea, Yemoja traditions are constantly changing in a manner that provides a template for understanding social and cultural change, hybridity, and reconfiguration" (xxv- xxvi).

Maja's struggles with change and questions of birth and symbolic death mirror those of her rebirth in England and loss of her Cuban identity. Her anxiety about belonging and identity are constantly reflected in the increasing tension she feels between the different notions of home:

> I was seven years old when we came here. I've come to think that there's an age beyond which it is impossible to lift a child from the pervading marinade of an original country, pat them down with a paper napkin and then deep-fry them in another

> country, another language like hot oil scalding the first language away. I arrived here just before that age. (Oyeyemi 12)

There is a seemingly distant, Afro-Cuban identity she is trying to recover, in the midst of a present identity as British citizen and future mother struggling both with her new life to come and what gets left behind. One example of this constant struggle is in her relationship with childhood friends from Cuba such as Magalys and her relationship to music, which become barometers of her levels of Cubanness. When Magalys visits from Cuba, Maja's constant attempts to remember their childhood is challenged by her friend's memories of the island that confirm her identity as Cuban. While Magalys's more immediate memories of Cuba intensify Maja's doubts about her own Cubanness, it is only through music and performance that Maja finds a space to reenvision her past and present identity as a positive part of her complex Afro-Cubanness: "It's the five-year-old Maja that brings jazz into me . . . I turn my Cuba over in my mind: a myriad of saltwater moons whirring around the inside of Vedado . . . I remember a tiny, veiled woman appeared beneath the palm trees (Oyeyemi 44-5). Her repetition of the verb remember—"I remember paper plates fuzzed with fruitcake crumbs / I remember a tiny, veiled woman appeared beneath the palm trees / "—emphasizes the role of memory as part of her connection to and separation from her sense of a national Cuban identity (44-5).

In spite of the memory's importance in her self-identification with regards to Cuba, ironically, one path she considers to help her create a more grounded and secure new identity and sense of connection seems to be through forgetting. She thinks, "I need my Cuba memory back, or something just as small, just as rich to replace it, more food for my son, for me. I think I will pretend that I am not from Cuba and neither is my son. The boy and I started a race from that other country, and I got here first" (168). Maja's juxtaposition of memory and forgetting, of geographies erased and others reconstructed, underscore Cousins' analysis of the difficulties of belonging in a seemingly pluralistic society. Here Maja's dilemma at her unending marginalization leads her to craft her own postcolonial hybrid space through the paradox of the Caribbean memories she needs and the sense of belonging in the European space that she fights.

For Yemaya, on the other hand, the anxiety of displacement from an Old World to an unknown new one is reflected in her pain and loss of identity. There is a sense of confusion and forgetting shared by other individual orisha like Aya and other groups of orisha who reside in the somewherehouse. For Cousins, it is this parallel with Maja that suggests Aya's separation as evidence of "the impossibility of Maja's at-

tempts to form a cultural identity based on her own history in Cuba" (3). Oyeyemi's critique of the price of dislocation from not only the past but also the rooted identity it provided, and the complex and at times problematic hybrid negotiations of identity in the face of dominant discourses of assimilation are especially represented by Aya's confrontation in the hospital with another orisha Ochún, now named Amy, who has lost her memory. Their exchange foregrounds Amy's desperation to contest her loss through a reconnection with her past – her geographical and spiritual origins: "'Ochun, Ochun. Please say it. Yemaya Saramagua, you must know my name,' . . . 'I should never have left. Why doesn't anybody know my name?'"(Oyeyemi 194). Symbolically, Amy's dilemma reveals the dangers of an irretrievable original home and the difficulties of negotiating a process of hybridity that is in actuality more assimilationist than truly egalitarian.

After Aya's realization that she and other Orishas journeying into the New World space forget their original natures and deteriorate, her return to the somewherehouse leads her to witness further the destruction of her African roots through the death of Kayode and the discovery that the Lagos door has been nailed shut. Such a realization reflects the inability to return to one's origins. Yet, as Cousins notes, it may also emphasize the author's critique of the troubling side of cultural transmission and loss whereby cultural forms cannot be brought intact into newer cultural spaces.[19] It is, however, in the concluding section of the novel that Oyeyemi's use of African diasporic religious practice seems to highlight the complex relationship between forgetting and remembering, fragmentation and wholeness, and the complexity of women's religious lives as neither wholly celebratory and liberating nor critical and oppressive, as Marie Griffith and Barbara Savage call us to consider. [20] Yemaya's act of burning down the somewherehouse as a response to the trauma of forgetting, alongside Maja's mental deterioration, isolation, and unstable identities incited by "the folding and refolding caused by multiple discourses which is making her disappear, like the numbers, into those creases" seem to indicate failed desires of recovery and reconnection (Cousins 15). Oyeyemi's representation of Yemaya further questions the effects of displacement and the seeming promises of discourses of hybridity as egalitarian and liberatory.

What links Hopkinson and Oyeyemi's works, nonetheless, is their use of the African-derived female deities Ezili and Yemaya within a space of narrative experimentation to embody the "difficult diasporas" that cross geographical borders and decenter African and European discourses of race, gender, and power while also recognizing the complexities and tensions of this endeavor. Through the common link of the hybrid Afro-Caribbean cultural figure of Ezili, Hopkinson explores

the importance of spirituality for black female subjects in the larger complex processes of loss and fragmentation and recovery, transformation and resistance simultaneously. For Hopkinson, Ezili's temporal, transnational migrations and spiritual connections provide avenues of empowerment in the midst of oppression, through a collective diasporic consciousness that also subverts traditional historic narratives and black women's place in them.

Oyeyemi's ambiguity at Maja's ability to reconcile her multiple identities, however, particularly highlights the tensions of negotiating these geographic sites of Europe, the Caribbean, and Africa (here represented symbolically) and the importance of such struggles for questions of power and belonging in a contemporary diasporic, transnational context. Maja's understanding of her identity is continuously complicated by presence and absence: what is forgotten, erased, possibly irretrievably lost, remembered, or recreated. Her observation in the novel's conclusion that she and her brother "quieten, in case we disturb them, our guardians and guides, our Orishas in the house, the ones upstairs asleep," while holding her mother's worn Santería collar that she has stolen, is an acknowledgement of the presence of the living with their spiritual "guides," and an assertion that the African diasporic cultural practices of spirituality are, in fact, a complex coexistence of fragmentation and unity (Oyeyemi 258). Through the negotiations of geographical and temporal space, narrative, and psychological decenterings, with alternative Afro-diasporan discourses of spiritual knowledge, both writers provide textual and cultural strategies that explore the possibilities and problematics of memory and migration. Such approaches ultimately confront and contest discourses of oppression while reflecting the complex alliances of black women across national and regional borders.

Notes

1. Alexander, 292-3.

2. While the African-based religion practiced in Haiti has alternate spellings (Vodou, Voudou, Voodoo), I will use "Voudoun" in this essay. Similarly, Ezili is a representation of the loa Erzulie who has multiple incantations. I will use Hopkinson's naming of Ezili throughout to refer to the loa in the text. Dayan provides more explanation of the different manifestations of the loa, 41.

3. Ramraj, 135.

4. Dayan, 41-44.

5. Ibid, 42.

6. Ibid, 42.

7. Marsh-Locket and West, 114.

8. Fernandez Olmos, 126.

9. Gadsby, 29.

10. Ramraj, 147.

11. Hutcheon, 123.

12. Salisbury, 346-7.

13. Ibid, 346.

14. By African cosmovisions I refer to the set of diverse African beliefs that demonstrate "the pivotal role and inescapable presence of religion in the formation and organization of social, cultural, political and economic structures and lifestyles" (*The Cambridge History of Religions in Latin America* 48). According to Asonzeh Ukah their reconstruction represents the: "ordered systems and harmonious wholes in and through which the peoples of Africa generate sense, values, meaning, and belongings and have their being" (48).

15. Gilroy, 15.

16. Marouan, 1.

17. Cousins, 7.

18. Falola, 10.

19. Cousins,10.

20.Griffith and Savage, xi.

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About the Author

Dr. Lesley Feracho is an Associate Professor in the Department of Romance Languages and the Institute of African-American Studies at the University of Georgia. Dr. Feracho specializes in contemporary Latin American narrative, women's narrative of the Caribbean, as well as Afro-Latin American narrative and poetry.

Senegal in France, France in Senegal: Successful and Failed Transnational Identities in Fatou Diome's Novels

Rosemary Haskell

Introduction: Fatou Diome's Transnational Life and Works

Fatou Diome—born in 1968 in Senegal and an émigrée to France since 1990—after a debut short story collection, *La préférence nationale* [*National Preference*] in 2001, has published five novels, all of them foregrounding migration: *Le ventre de l'Atlantique* [*The Belly of the Atlantic*] (2003); *Kétala* (2006); *Inassouvies, nos vies* [*Our Unfulfilled Lives*] (2008); *Celles qui attendent* [*Women Who Wait*] (2010); and *Impossible de grandir* [*Impossible to Grow Up*] (2013). Four of these five novels chart the experiences of young Senegalese migrants to France, where, still enmeshed in their past lives, they try to negotiate an entrée into French society. The migrant experience, transnational in its reach, is at the heart of Fatou Diome's work. She is, as Dominic Thomas says, one of the "African and/or Franco-African" writers who have "authored works that address the challenges that come with having to negotiate multiple identities as both they *and* their protagonists circulate between Africa and France and Africa *in* France" (*Africa and France* 143). In *Celles qui attendent*, Diome's thematic exception, the rural Senegalese "women who wait" for their émigré men to return from Europe are still affected by the transnational condition of a Senegal shaped by its position as a migrant's departure point.

As a public literary figure in France, Diome, who has acknowledged in interviews the strong connections between her own life and her fiction, comments about immigration in its contemporary French context which, as Dominic Thomas remarks, with "national identity," "have been central issues in French politics for decades now" (*Africa and France* 6).[1] The old relationship between France and its former colony Senegal remains particularly fraught, as Gary Wilder's account of former French President Nicolas Sarkozy's 2007 speech in Dakar illustrates.[2] Sarkozy evoked Léopold Sédar Senghor and his histori-

cal connection to the concept of *Eurafrique* and berated Senegal for "choosing to remain stubbornly outside the stream of modern history" (Wilder 57).[3]

Furthermore, as a woman from predominantly Muslim Senegal, Diome is a touchstone for other national French debates which now have global reach, as Europe continues to struggle with massive migration from African and Middle Eastern countries, and contends with anxieties about Islamic fundamentalism and its relationship to terrorism. Diome's novels, with continuing relevance, explore and construct, from the migrant sub-Saharan African perspective, facets of the European continent's political, ethical, and emotional condition. Her own career, spanning the first fifteen years of the new century, describes the transnational literary and broader cultural matrix that literary critics and cultural analysts call, variously, "France Noire," "Black France," "Afropean," "Eurafrique," and "Afrique[s] Sur Seine."[4] Diome's work also represents what Odile Cazenave calls the concerns of a "new generation" of African writers living in France; one specific concern is addressed quite succinctly: "The phenomenon of migration considered in its entirety as a collective phenomenon, affecting both the community left behind and the one which is found in the new space" (Cazenave 162).

In spite of this Afro/European frame, however, race does not dominate her novels. After *La préférence nationale* (2001), which indeed features racially-charged encounters between black Africans and white Europeans in France, Diome's five novels only fleetingly touch the topic directly.[5] In *Impossible de grandir*, for instance, Salie's ex-mother-in-law "ne supportait pas une Noire dans sa famille" ("could not stand a Black in her family") (290). Instead, the five novels reveal a transnational experience defined by the émigrées' strenuous attempts to reach autonomous identity within a new social context while still confronting the problems of their Senegalese childhood and youth. Diome explores lives that, in actuality and in contemplative memory, bring Senegal to France and, less frequently, France back to Senegal again. The difficulties of this transnational circulation or exchange are many and it is Diome's achievement to chart with extraordinary depth the ways in which her Black African heroines attempt to navigate the difficult waters of the transnational experience in contemporary France and, to a lesser degree, in Senegal. In doing so, she joins other Francophone African women authors equally interested in the way disadvantaged heroines try to form their own identities against the cultural grain. Catherine Mazauric, for example, sees this shared theme as "Une quête de soi dans la maison de l'autre," or the quest of the self in the house of

the other, in the work of Aminata Sow Fall, Ken Bugul, and in Diome's first novel, *Le ventre de l'Atlantique*.

Transnationalism's Complexities

Migration implies transnationalism, though the two terms are not identical. Michael Kearney connects them:

> Transnationalism overlaps globalization but typically has a more limited purview. Whereas global processes are largely decentered from specific national territories . . . transnational processes are anchored in and transcend one or more nation states. . . . Thus transnational is the term of choice when referring to . . . migration of nationals across the borders of one or more nations. (Kearney 273)

Though migrants historically sought a kind of melting pot integration, with ties to the old country eventually fading, the migrant is now communicating freely and is much more likely in the twenty-first century to be a transnational being.[6] Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller go on to define this new condition: "The transnational migration experience is a kind of gauge which, while anchored, pivots between host land and transnational connections" (285). Transnationalism is only one of many terms which attempt to analyze relationships among humans and their cultures. Overlapping with globalization and cosmopolitanism, and related problematically to nationalism and colonialism, transnationalism may critique and illuminate those terms.[7] Transnationalism and migration form their own field of study, according to Levitt and Glick Schiller, and include different stages and types of the transnational condition.[8] Transnationalism, by definition, crosses national boundaries, de-emphasizing as it does so the importance of the sovereign nation state, which has been the dominant unit of group identity in recent history. Transnationalism means, for example, to adopt Alain Mabanckou's claim, that "Africa is no longer solely *in* Africa" (87). Peter Schwab, going in the opposite direction, notes that Dakar is still very French.[9] Quoting Michael Crowder, he argues, "Dakar in the twenty-first century is as French as it is Senegalese" (Schwab 68). And, as Crowder further notes, "Assimilation has not been entirely a one-way process: Senegal has gained a place in the heart of France that no other former colony ever has" (Schwab 95).

Transnationalism, as Diome's émigrées experience it, occurs principally in memory and contemplation. It is internal. Her novels illus-

trate this immaterial interiority and its related complexity, blurring the home/abroad binary. She depicts transnationalism as encompassing "imagined communities," modifying Elisabeth Mudimbé-Boyi's use of Benedict Anderson's concept to signal a "Black France" (Mudimbé-Boyi 31, n. 34). Levitt and Glick Schiller, focusing on this interiority and complexity, locate within the transnational a "simultaneity" of action and feeling, which is part of Pierre Bourdieu's "social field" (286). Pierre Bourdieu's "'Field of cultural production'. . . is said to be 'a structured space with its own law of functioning and its own relations of force' in which agents compete for resources and interests by utilizing diverse forms of capital (symbolic, cultural, economic)," according to Elizabeth Harney (54). Using "a social field approach to the study of migration [Levitt and Glick Schiller] argue that assimilation and enduring transnational ties are neither incompatible nor binary opposites" and that the "concept of social fields is a powerful tool for conceptualizing the potential array of social relations linking those . . . who move and those who stay behind" (284, 286). Bourdieu's theory of "social fields" of intersecting social, economic, and other cultural practices can thus help us to grasp the multiple visible and invisible connections that link a migrant's original country with the new country. Diome's novels provide a rich terrain for this kind of investigation.

Good or Bad Transnationalism?

In the charged world of cultural politics, transnationalism—like globalization and cosmopolitanism—is not without its critics. Meyda Yegenoglu refers, for example, to Gayatri Spivak's critique from "Diasporas Old and New" in which she argues that "disenfranchised subaltern groups of the subaltern south vanish from the discourse of transnationality precisely because they are made interchangeable . . . with the migrants in the First World metropolis" (Yegenoglu 72).[10] Colonial and postcolonial histories are indeed implicated by the transnational, as in considerations of globalization and the cosmopolitan. This relevance is particularly evident when we examine the ways in which the term "transnational" is connected, historically, with other notable attempts to explore, critique, and develop black colonial African and Caribbean concepts of identity and connection. These attempts are signaled by a host of terms: Édouard Glissant's "Rhizome" and "Relation" ; Léopold Senghor and Aimé Césaire's "Négritude" ; W. E. B. Du Bois's "Panafricanism" ; and "Creolity" and "Antillanité," developed by Édouard Glissant and others.[11] All of these terms conceptualize intellectual, aesthetic, ethical, and spiritual quests to transcend the limited

boundaries of identity and mono-connection implied by the sovereign nation state. Debra Anderson illuminates the ties among these related but distinctive delimiters while Hélène Tissières emphasizes, in her study of intra-African connectivity, the work of Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Édouard Glissant, Abdelkebir Khatibi, Abdelwahab Meddeb, and Réda Bensmaia on the "problematics of definitions differentiating texts that circulate beyond borders" (Tissières 5).[12]

The upshot of these images of multiplicity and connection, as Elisabeth Mudimbé-Boyi says, is to renounce or obviate "une identité racine unique" ("a single root identity") (24). Levitt and Glick Schiller remind us of the conversation that this array of labels signals: all are responses, in part, to the inadequacy of racist, nationalist, and colonialist – and sovereign-state—control of personal and group identity, and of human relationships.[13]

Transnationalism and Loss

In challenging single sovereign identity, and hence isolation, these concepts longingly reach out for connections which may be unattainable or absent. They are signs of what Sam Durrant, in *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning: J. M. Coetzee, Wilson Harris, and Toni Morrison* (2004), has called the grief and mourning integral to the lives of colonized and other marginalized and oppressed peoples who have lost an original identity normally formed by ties with an authentic and known past.[14] These losses and the prolonged grieving they generate are directly encountered by Diome's émigrées. As maturing transnationals, they strive to counter the losses and griefs of their marginalized girlhoods in Senegal while, as Julia Kristeva's "strangers to themselves," they essay the healing reincorporation of their "abject" and problematic other selves.[15] The transnational condition also holds much promise for migrants, particularly, but successful transnationalism is psychologically and economically strenuous. To survive and thrive in two or more places—at both ends of that "pivot," which swings between Europe and Africa—challenges Diome's characters' human resources.[16] It is to their lives that I now turn.

Diome's Vision of the Transnational Senegalese Woman in France

Necessary conditions for such transnational successes include finding and maintaining a degree of portability of personal identity and con-

necting to old home and new culture—a way of multilateral being *and* belonging.[17] This implied acceptance of the migrant guest by the host culture may be, as Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of the guest/host dyad illustrates, very problematic.[18] The paths to any productive transnational migrant condition, and the obstacles which may prevent its attainment, are at the heart of Diome's plotting of her characters' lives and careers. In four of her five novels, her émigrés to France struggle to develop adult autonomy and to forge connections within France, to the Senegal of their memories, and to the present day.

Framing the Problems Faced by Diome's Transnational Migrants

Diome's novels invite us to understand, then, in amazing depth and detail, the problems undermining the individual migrant's transnational project, where identity formation, and the construction and maintenance of connection at both points of the transnational "pivot," are at stake. Critical concepts from feminist, postcolonial, deconstructive, and psychoanalytic theory illuminate these transnational projects and help to explain the degrees of their success and failure. Diome's transnational women in France have tough lives. They lead solitary and isolated lives in France, but are still tied to Senegal and their own troubled pasts through memory and also in real time. They are faced with the modern European transnational migrant challenge: making yourself a viable person in metropolitan France and wrangling, successfully, with the ties to your homeland, which symbolizes your (often painful) past. The heroines here participate in what Catherine Mazauric calls "la déconstruction des codes qui, de part et d'autre des sociétés et des cultures, empêchent les sujets d'advenir" ("the demolition of codes which, on both sides of society and culture, stop the subject from becoming") (251). Some succeed more than others. All Diome's novels except *Celles qui attendent* map the women's inner *and* outer journeys, employing recursive plots that repeatedly shuttle back and forth through memory and real visits home. Her protagonists return imaginatively and actually to their places of early distress. They pursue jagged pathways, backwards through remembered sorrows of African childhood sufferings and forward again into a French present which cannot fully salve those early wounds. Generally, these women are shadowed by oppressive upbringings, in a way that Mireille Nnanga sees as common to other Francophone African fictional heroines.[19] They suffer from the unstable Derridean "spectrality" which, as Meyda Yegenoglu explains, besets the migrant self, "always haunted by

its double" (31). Derrida's notion of the spectrality of the migrant's life by the other self and place illuminates the paradoxical instability of the Derridean "hostipitality" which Diome's characters contend with.[20] Some are equal to the challenge.

Ventre: The Artist's Fulfilment

Salie, the migrant protagonist of *Le ventre de L'Atlantique* [*The Belly of the Atlantic*], Diome's first novel, enacts a role economically and aesthetically productive enough to produce a successful transnational identity which "pivots" effectively, mainly by telephone, from Europe back to Senegal, to benefit those she leaves behind. In addition, Salie, a writer—like her author—reaches individual artistic polymorphous identity. She closes the novel by exclaiming, "I seek my country on a white page, a notebook . . . No net can prevent the seaweed of the Atlantic from drifting and drawing its savour from the waters it traverses. . . . Leave, live freely and die, like seaweed in the Atlantic" (*Belly* 183). As Kathleen Farley Galvagni argues, the novel –and its oceanic center—invoke and illuminate Édouard Glissant's concept of "relation." The Atlantic, paradoxically, with its slave history tying Africa to the Caribbean, also offers new opportunities for an erasure of old divisions.[21] This successful story, however, occurs in a patriarchal, postcolonial, and capitalist context; in a Senegal independent only a few years. Salie's transnational success is achieved against the "grain" of these dominant "codes" (Mazauric 251).

While evoking historical horrors of the Atlantic slave trade and the middle passage of the 16th-19th centuries, the novel also sketches a new kind of trade in black bodies: the European soccer circuit, which embroils young men from Senegal and elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, in its dreams of fame and riches. As Dominic Thomas says, Diome establishes "transhistorical links pertaining to the relations between Africa and France and the ongoing problem of exploitation in competitive labor markets" (*Black France* 196). Diome's work is, Thomas argues, in the literary tradition of that of Ousmane Sembène's 1960 novel *Black Docker/Le docker noir* (*Black France* 198). The boys on Salie's island of Niodior, off the coast of Senegal, want to play the game. They watch league play on television, and, in a soccer World Cup year, all eyes are on Italian star Maldini's golden touch. Madické, Salie's younger brother, is caught up in this dream. From her Strasbourg apartment, however, she counsels him, in endless expensive telephone calls, *not* to migrate. Her message finally gets through. She, with the money she makes in France, offers a lifeline to her brother, who uses the money to invest in

his own grocery business in Niodior. He is content to stay there, having now no desire to emigrate: "'I prefer living in my own country . . . now I've got my shop,'" he says (*Belly* 180). Thus he escapes the horror of the new soccer-slave trade.

This happy ending gleams diamond-like among the novel's heap of migrant horror stories. Niodior's men disappear into the maw of the international soccer market, to be chewed up and never heard of again; or, they return, broken, like Moussa, to die. Occasionally, they return with fabulous tales of golden Europe. The Man From Barbès lives on these duplicitous tales. Mireille Nnanga rightly emphasizes the novel's satire of such fraudulent ties between Africa and the West (405). Embroiling "African Youth in the global economy," Diome's football plot also demonstrates how "development politics and globalization have become central issues in contemporary African fiction" (Thomas, *Black France,* 185, 253 n. 3).[22] Mass media perpetuate the myth of the European wealth fantasy, the natural extension of French capitalist-colonialism. Like sacks of peanuts, Niodior's boys are marketed to benefit the metropolitan center.

In this potentially lethal matrix, however, Diome complicates and enriches the representation of the successful transnational émigrée by characterizing Salie as an artist. Her identity is configured as productively liminal. She floats like seaweed between the two worlds, writing her own identity on the inviting blank page. She is the heroine of an émigrée's *künstlerroman:* her art provides the route to full individuation that flourishes in a world without borders. She may be an exile in some ways, but, says Mazauric, she is not a tragic one.[23] Christiane Schoenaers regards this artist figure very biographically, and refers us to Diome's own claim to "Être libre en écrivant" ("to be free in writing") (55).[24] She even quotes Salie to make her point: "Mon stylo, semblable à une pioche d'archéologue . . . Je compose maintenant mes nourritures d'exil" ("My pen [is] like an archaeologist's pickaxe . . . I now create my exile's nourishment") (*Ventre* 259).[25]

Salie has achieved autonomy and some kind of connection to home. In doing so, she transforms by incorporating the weight of Kristeva's "abject" other—the unwelcome, illegitimate girl in Islamic patriarchy—into present wholeness. Salie is indeed a genetic ghost, as Mireille Nnanga argues, like Calixthe Beyala's *La petite fille du r*éverbère*:* "'Elle n'a pas de père, c'est la fille d'un fantôme'" ("She has no father, she is the daughter of a ghost") (qtd. Nnanga 401). But Diome's Salie overcomes that haunting. In addition, Salie's artistic world view partially sidesteps the "pivot" problem in a way repeated, but with significant variations, in the later novel, *Impossible de grandir.* "Living in an 'in-between space,'" says Eric Tonya de Marenne about other francophone fictional

cross-cultural and nomadic identities, can be "a state of estrangement and abandonment" but it can "alternatively produce a sense of exhilaration," which we hear in Salie's closing words (de Marenne 86). Her pivoting ability is strong enough to include Madické, who, though not a migrant himself, is part of the transnational matrix in Senegal. As Levitt and Glick Schiller explain, transnationalism affects those who stay at home, as well as those who leave.[26]

Limited Transnational Success in Small Fragile Spaces

It is possible that—like Leo Tolstoy's unhappy families—all unhappy immigrants are unhappy in their own way, but Diome's share much common ground. [27] Her less successful Senegalese émigrées struggle to integrate productively with their new French environment while still burdened by memories of their troubled Senegalese pasts. Like Salie in *Ventre,* they must ride the far-from-smooth "pivot" between France and Senegal. And, as must all young people, Diome's young women must endure the human maturation process: they must "grow up," but in a foreign space. Interior development, forming ties with France, and negotiating connections with Senegal as it was and as it is now, weave this transnational web. Diome's plots and characters in *Inassouvies, nos vies* and *Impossible de grandir* emphasize the work of creating nurturing spaces, both temporary and permanent, where growth *and* integration can occur. One kind of transnational shortcoming is the failure to move beyond a limited migrant's space to engage fully with French society, as is true of Betty.

Inassouvies, nos vies: A Temporary French Connection

Betty, the young Senegalese migrant of *Inassouvies, nos vies* [*Our Unfulfilled Lives*], lives alone, but she bonds with the old French woman, whom Betty names "Félicité," living opposite her. After watching her from afar, Betty befriends this solitary World War II widow, visiting her in her retirement home until, during Betty's absence on holiday, Félicité dies. This leaves the younger woman to grieve alone and to confront again the losses of her own past. Apart from this key connection with Félicité, solitary Betty resembles Alfred Hitchcock's "rear-window" voyeur—like a magnifying glass, she is "Betty la Loupe"—surveying her neighbors' lives from her apartment.[28] This space serves her

well insofar as it is a place of creativity, like the spaces of Salie in *Ventre* and in *Impossible de grandir*: "L'écriture était son seul maître! Écrire, encore et toujours. Une façon de mettre de l'ordre, de nettoyer . . ." ("Writing was her only master! To write, always and again. A way of putting things in order, of cleaning...") (*INV* 190). Like Salie in *Ventre*, Betty too seeks a "voyage out" where she can be free (*INV* 224off).

Criticism of old people's social isolation in modern France is a major theme, leaving Betty's Senegalese migrant identity on the periphery of the story. It is only after Félicité's death that Betty, triggered by her bereavement, journeys in memory to her childhood in Senegal, where another long-buried grief confronts her. Her childhood friend, Mba Gnima, from whom she was inseparable until the ten-year-old's death, is part of the weight of a past which prevents Betty from achieving wholeness in the present: "Inassouvi, notre besoin de nous débarrasser de nos fantômes" ("Unfulfilled, our need to rid ourselves of our ghosts") (203). Like all Diome's migrant heroines, she is haunted by the past; but Betty's transnational project—unlike Salie's—comes to an abrupt and mysterious end. The novel ends with Betty's unexplained disappearance. She turns ghost-like, leaving her empty apartment—and her music and manuscript writings—to transmit fragmented messages to puzzled friends. In psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's terms, Betty's desire for the "other," the wholeness found with mother-surrogate Félicité, has its objective correlative in her writing: a kind of Lacanian "*jouissance*."[29] But she is otherwise unfulfilled. The work of mourning remains incomplete and the Derridean guest/host relationship has in fact deconstructed itself. The temporary space she created for herself in the new European world finally lacked the oxygen of friendship, of hospitality, that would have invigorated her life. Her disappearance is a dramatic indictment of her failed transnational condition. In Bourdieu's "social field" terms, she has failed to create the dynamic matrix of reciprocal thought and action in which to live as a fully mature adult.

Impossible de grandir: Creating a Permanent But Solitary Space

Ghosts also feature in this most recent novel, which analyzes the migrant life of another Salie, whom I will call "Salie II," in Strasbourg: a suitably liminal and contested space in French and German history and geography. This Salie II, in *Impossible de grandir,* or "Impossible to Grow Up," is, as its title indicates, a woman struggling to find a mature adult identity. This grown-up condition, however, must accommodate memories of Salie II's difficult childhood in Senegal, where, as an ille-

gitimate baby girl in an Islamic patriarchal culture, she was always on the periphery, always in danger of total rejection by her family. Indeed, that family's very definition was always in doubt. Only the love and devotion of her maternal grandparents, now remembered in passionate detail, saved her from desolation and abandonment. She is tracked by her ghostly girlhood duenna, La Petite: "Mais une petite fille me poursuivait, me harcelait, ajoutait ses mots à mes propres mots, ruinait l'armature mentale que je m'évertuais à faire tenir depuis des années, et je ne pouvais rien contre ses attaques" ("But a little girl pursued me, harassed me, added her words to my own words, ruined the mental frame that I strove to hold up for years and I could do nothing against her attacks") (56). Thus, Salie II is driven and drawn repeatedly back into her past. Her long meditations on her maternal Uncle Tonton's anger and hostility towards her—using her "sinning" mother as his excuse—show the pain of her precarious position. Uncle Tonton both claims and rejects his niece as kin, emblematizing Derrida's deconstructive and undecidable condition of "hostipitality" in a place that should have been home to her.[30] This "hostipitality" is at the center of the novel, as is the Kristevan challenge to subjectivity, which must expel the unwanted other, or "abject," to survive (Yegenoglu 37).

Materially secure, Salie II has a crippling social problem: she cannot accept ordinary invitations to dine at the homes of her French friends. The premise of this very long novel is her extended hesitation over her friend Marie-Odile's invitation to dinner. Salie II hates going to other people's houses, preferring to meet in neutral spaces such as cafés or park-benches. No guests come to her apartment. Through this mundane social dilemma, Diome juxtaposes the French adult present with the complex story of Salie II's childhood past in Senegal. As the novel unfolds, the reader understands that her parents' primordial denial of hospitality to their child still defines Salie's life. As an illegitimate baby, she was the uninvited guest, taken in by her grandparents, the surrogate parents/hosts. Now, as a migrant, she again experiences life within a problematic guest/host binary. Derrida's definition and deconstruction of this opposition, as explained by Gideon Baker's *Politicising Ethics in International Relations: Cosmopolitanism as Hospitality* and by Meyda Yegenoglu, in *Islam, Migrancy and Hospitality in Europe* illuminates the transaction at the heart of transnationalism and reveals its fragility. Salie II *was* a worker/relative/guest hybrid in her uncle's house. Now, remembering that pain, she cannot tolerate the guest role of migrant in France. Alas, she is also guilty, in Derridean fashion, of denying her would-be French hosts their own status. No host can exist without guests and she refuses to play her part.

Again, the transnational "social field" is gashed. Salie II, like Diome's other migrant women, tries to weave a socio-cultural field around two multiple places: present France, past Senegal, and its present version. What is fascinating, particularly to those critics who follow Spivak in worrying about the way that transnationalism may devalue the formerly colonized third-world space, is that Salie II rejects present-day Senegal. It does not meet her imagined pre-Islamic, golden-age rendition of a Senegal where all babies were welcomed and where all goods were shared in common. The Senegal that Salie II celebrates in memory—or imagination—is not there. Like the ethnic tourist, who likes "natives" only in a place that she herself can control, she rejects her real encounters there, remaining attached only to those about to die (her grandparents) and to those of a near-mythic past recounted by these relics.[31] The warriors, the Guelwaars, and the matriarchal Sérères, who preceded the Islamic and French "invasions": these are her true people. She seems gripped by an allotrope of the "imperialist nostalgia" analyzed by Yegenoglu (41).

In these ways, Salie II's transnationalism shifts towards neocolonialism: it excludes actual, present, Senegal. Her "pivot" back to Senegal is partially impeded by her false memory of an arcadian Senegal of her imagination. Lacan again is helpful. Salie II also seeks the pristine love of the mother she never knew: hence the quest to escape from the present alienated and "real" place and into the mythic place where wholeness can be achieved. That place also happens to be a Senegal, which, though golden in imagination, is ghostlike and unreachable. When she finally does accept Marie-Odile's dinner invitation and sets out for her friend's house, Salie II does not arrive. Instead, she collapses on the street and ends up—with narrative irony—in the hospital, another suitably liminal, quasi-hospitable lodging. Here, to be a guest with a bed is to be a sick person; to be told or invited to leave (to be expelled from your lodging) is to be well again. Patients also resemble prisoners, those most unwilling of guests. The allotropes of hospitality are varied indeed; and they signal transnational fragility. Assimilation is not on the table, to use another hospitality metaphor, and Salie II's pivoting back and forth between worlds cannot fulfil her. Her life in France is one big failed dinner date, where she feels like the "foie gras" being fattened for the feast, or the turkey, "farcie de vos desirs" ("stuffed with your desires"), to satisfy others' needs, not her own (376). So, she must go on alone, marching to her own drumbeat. Her writing is—as for Salie I and Betty—the key to her autonomous productive identity: "Je me déclare princesse de tous les enfants illégitimes du monde!" ("I declare myself princess of all illegitimate children in the world!") (308). She will write to draw out another world from her

wounds. She has thus created a permanent but still limited space in France, for herself alone. We do not imagine her accepting any other dinner invitations to her French friends' houses. The last chapter is all about *solitary* achievement.

Transnational Failure: *Kétala* and the Death of the Migrant

Mémoria, *Kétala's* protagonist, achieves nothing but heartbreak, prostitution, sickness and death in her transnational project. Seeking a life in France with Makhou, her new husband, she is aware of his homosexual orientation and hidden life in Senegal. Mémoria fails to achieve successful adult autonomy and satisfactory integration into French culture. Her very name signals the inescapable pull of her own past, which draws her back into its web of sexist patriarchy and crude materialism. These are the very forces which also threaten her in France, where she must make money for those at home. She goes out into France, to "débusquer toutes les richesses de la terre française" ("to flush out all the riches of the French land") (*Kétala* 202-203). But after the fragile marriage collapses and Makhou moves in with Max, his new lover, poverty affects Mémoria's moral code, leading her into prostitution: "La situation financière de Mémoria influait sur son moral" (224). Her ties to French society are thus reified in the crudest Marxist—and sexist—fashion, like those of the soccer-mad boys from *Ventre*. She expands her business across the European Union. Only the language barrier is a brake on her international business until what we are left to infer is HIV/AIDS sickens her. She returns to Senegal to die. Her estranged husband loyally accompanies her and mourns her in the apartment packed with her dusty furniture.

Diome's narrative tactic is to make Mémoria's possessions and furniture relate her story, including the last Muslim funerary rite of "kétala," the dispersal of the goods of the deceased. Her belongings tell the ultimate ghost story. The principal speakers, a traditional ornamental mask, a watch, and the statue of a hunter, appropriately convey the novel's key motifs of pretense and unresolved duality, the passage of time, and the quest for a new way of being. Homecoming solves nothing for Mémoria or her husband, where the patriarchal, materialist, and homophobic culture persists. Rejected by her parents for her "degenerate" disease, she is nursed in secret by her fearful mother-in-law. Here, the transnational project is made null. No productive pivoting between two worlds is possible: only a retreat to a world of stagnant

values, symbolized by Mémoria's museum-like apartment, haunted by the bereaved husband.

Kétala's homophobic theme both resonates and conflicts with actual late twentieth and early twenty-first century Senegalese attitudes towards men who have sex with men (MSMs). Mouhamadou Tidiane Kassé describes a spike in homophobic violence and prosecution there in 2008-09, for example, while on the other hand explaining a long-standing attitude of quiet acceptance of the "*gorjigen* (*homme-femme*, or man-woman)"—the Wolof word that refers to the homosexual (Kassé 262-263). Kassé also gives examples of open, positive newspaper discussion of homosexuality in the Senegal of the 1990s and early 2000s.[32] Diome's 2006 novel does no more than hint at this complex mix of shifting attitudes in its account of Makhou's secret love—in Gambia and Senegal—for Tamsir/Tamara, the gay man who presents as a woman.[33] Makhou's hidden duality as a gay man in Senegal is apparently resolved in France. He lives openly with Max. Back at home, clearly he alone cannot build that "social field," which might harmonize at least some European and Senegalese norms and attitudes.[34] His own personally dissonant relationship to his home culture prevents him from being able to pivot back there successfully—symbolically or actually. On his return, he returns to Tamsir/Tamara, a secret connection represented by Diome as a life-giving river for Makhou. For both Mémoria and Makhou, however, "home" remains unmodified by any transnational network of material and symbolic ties, as Senegal is—in however limited a fashion—in *Ventre,* and, in an exceptional fashion, in *Celles qui attendent*, to which I now turn.

Celles qui attendent: Transnationalism at Home

Focused on "waiting women" at home in rural Senegal, this novel offers a domestic view of transnationalism. Diome narrates the experiences of the women who await their sons, brothers, husbands, and lovers returning to them after their forays into Europe. As Christian Schoenaers explains, in this novel, the women "condamnées à rester au pays et au village, doivent jour après jour porter le poids de toutes les déterminations que leur condition de femmes fait poser sur elles" ("Condemned to remain in their country and village, they must day after day bear the weight of all the constraints which their female condition places on them") (151). Their opportunities for "épanouissement personelle" ("personal growth") he argues, are severely limited.[35] Two of these waiting women, I suggest, are in fact notably successful. Though non-migrants, the women of the novel, including migrant youth Lamine's

mother, Arame, and his wife Daba, live in a world shaped by migration. They also work to facilitate the young men's departures on economic pilgrimages to Europe. Arame, and her friend Bougna, plan to help their sons—like many other village boys—take their chance on a boat to Spain. The migrant quest, however, may also mean losing husbands and sons. The women are left to wait in hope. As I argue elsewhere,[36] Arame and her daughter-in-law Daba, in a new relationship that hinges on the absent migrant son and husband, show fortitude and together tread a painful emotional and moral path. They overcome their differences and hostilities after the older woman confronts, through memory and contemplation, the sins of her own past and forgives her daughter-in-law's similar transgressions: adultery and illegitimate childbearing. New love and mutual support now pervade the women's shared household. Arame tenderly asks her weeping daughter-in-law, "Et quelle berceuse dois-je trouver pour toi, ma grande?" ("And what lullaby shall I find for you, my darling?") (284-286). Together, they face the trials of their waiting lives, "Collées l'une à l'autre" ("Bound to each other") (285) (Haskell 150).

They have in essence constructed a type of female *Bildungsroman*—"the voyage in"—or the journey of female self-realization conducted at home and internally.[37] Mary Anne Ferguson's definition of this version of the usually masculine mode explains: "Instead of testing their self- image through adventures in the outside world, they are initiated at home through learning the rituals of human relationships so that they may replicate the lives of their mothers" (Ferguson 228). When the migrant son returns, a fairy-tale ending envelops his wife, mother, and the wife's baby (Haskell 145). The returning hero brings money and "western-style" French forgiveness for his wife's infidelity. He accepts the baby and builds a new house for his family. The widowed mother then re-connects with her former lover, the father of her own illegitimate sons. Harmonious integration of the "fields" of African and European values, aided by migrant money, complete the happy ending. The transnational migrant's "pivot" back home includes those who have never left, though the women participate vicariously in the men's voyage: "Mêmes privées de barque, une écorce de noix de coco leur suffisait pour braver les courants du destin; au village, celles qui restent à quai avancent, chacune au rythme de sa quête" ("Even deprived of a boat, a cocoa-nut shell was enough for them to brave destiny's tides; in the village, those who stay at the quayside move forward, each to her own quest's rhythm") (327).

Conclusion

Diome's novels illuminate a range of successful and failed migrant transnational projects. Success is the ability to develop a viable adult identity, to create, and to retain productive connections with both places. The migrant's success or failure is calibrated in units of autonomy and agency, and in degrees of multilateral integration into France now, and into present *and* past Senegal. Diome's migrants show themselves as able and unable, in varying degrees, to achieve this "pivoting" and social integration. The migrant heroines' transnational projects are threatened and sometimes thwarted by unassuaged grief for past sorrows at home, which stalls them in a phase of unfulfilled longing: usually for loving parents and for full acceptance into a nurturing home. Defined by past sadness, their personal lives in the French metropolitan center also allegorize the broader cultural losses and griefs of formerly colonized cultures on the periphery. Diome's representations of the Black transnational migrant project thus explore in rich detail the painful challenges of successful transnationalism, but spiritual and aesthetic and ethical opportunities are also offered. The artists Salie I in *Ventre* and Salie II in *Impossible de grandir* create permanent—even if rather solitary—spaces in Europe. Moreover, in *Ventre,* the pivot back to Senegal is concretized and enriched not only by Salie I's capital transfer to her brother but also by their shared affection. Betty, in *Inassouvies, nos vies*, disappears, however, after forming limited and temporary living space in France, while *Kétala's* Mémoria sickens and dies. On the home front, in *Celles qui attendent*, Arame and Daba show how transnationalism shapes those who never see the world beyond their island village. They feel the backwash of the migrant's voyage, and his absence triggers their own internal growth and connection, and his return in a fairy-tale, patriarchal, and capitalist fashion, concludes what is in fact a feminist story of individuation. Perhaps ironically, Arame and Daba attain at home the social and spiritual wholeness and integration denied to their more adventurous migrant sisters.

Notes

1. See interviews listed and note Diome's remark to Hasler and Delort: "Dans mon village je me suis sentie étrangère alors que je n'avais même pas quatre ans." ("In my village, I felt like an outsider when I was not even four years old.") (All translations are mine, unless otherwise noted.) See also Diome's comment to Tervonen: "Salie, c'est moi. Il n'y a pas de mystère là." ("Salie is me; there is no mystery there.")

2. Senegal gained independence in 1960. Sarkozy delivered his speech on July 26, 2007 in Dakar, the capital of Senegal.

3. As Wilder later explains, "In the early 1950s . . . Eurafrique was one name given to [the] entity" formed by France and its overseas territories combined (69-70). "As a deputy from Senegal in the National Assembly, Senghor . . . became an eloquent spokesperson for Eurafrique" (Wilder 70).

4. See also Fred Constant's discussion of race and national identity in "Black France and the National Identity Debate: How Best to be Black and French." For illustration, see the wording of titles of the works listed by Dominic Thomas, Nicki Hitchcott, Jacques Chevrier, Gary Wilder, and Keaton, Sharpley-Whiting and Stovall.

5. Two "race-themed" stories stand out from this collection: "Le visage de l'emploi" ("The Face of the Job") and "Cunégonde à la bibliothèque" ("Cunegonde in the Library").

6. Levitt and Glick Schiller, 284.

7. For astute analysis of these connected terms, see Yegenoglu, Chapter 3, "Cosmopolitanism in a Globalized World"; Baker, Chapter 1, "Towards a Genealogy of Hospitality"; Dominic Thomas, "Introduction," *Black France, Colonialism, Immigration and Transnationalism*; and Dominic Thomas, "Daniel Biyaoula: Exile, Immigration, and Transnational Cultural Production."

8. Levitt and Glick Schiller, 285; also see, for example, the analyses of Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller; and Wimmer and Glick Schiller.

9. Schwab, 68-69.

10. Spivak, 90-91.

11. Debra Anderson reviews and connects these terms admirably, 92ff. See also Elizabeth Harney on "négritude," 21-31; and on "panafricanism," 23-26.

12. Anderson, 92-97; and Tissières, xvii.

13. Levitt and Glick Schiller, 285.

14. In his first chapter, "Specters of Colonialism," Durrant states: "Their novels [i.e., those of J.M. Coetzee, Wilson Harris and Toni Morrison] invite us to participate in a ceaseless labor of remembrance, a labor which radically redefines the borders of community by teaching us how to live in memory of both the dead and all those whose living human presence continues to be disavowed by the present world order" (1).

15. Julia Kristeva, in *Strangers to Ourselves*, conceptualizes the self-division that exposes the stranger within the self. *In Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, she argues that "what is abject, . . . the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses" (2). Alison Rice, in "`Étrangères à elles –mêmes?' L'immigration en France chez les nouvelles écrivaines francophones," explicitly connects Kristeva's stranger within the self to the fictional renditions of the condition of the migrant-stranger-foreigner in France (Rice 215).

16. Levitt and Glick Schiller, 285.

17. Levitt and Glick Schiller, 287.

18. See Yegenoglu, 176-177, for an analysis of Derrida's concept of "hospitality," for example; and Baker's Chapter 6 on "Cosmopolitanism as Hospitality."

19. Nnanga, 403-404.

20. See Yegenoglu for a discussion of Derrida's notion of spectrality, 31.

21. Galvagni, 113-114. Galvagni argues that Diome's fiction is "promoting awareness for a process of creolization in order to combat the hegemonic forces of globalization that are threatening the future of the global village" (142). Galvagni's epigraph is from Édouard Glissant's Poetics of Relation: "'Je te salue, vieil Ocean!' You still preserve on your crests the silent boat of our births. . . . Then you lay out these new shores, where we hook our tar-streaked wounds, our reddened mouths and stifled outcries" (Trans. Betsy Wing; qtd. Galvagni, 103).

22. Nnanga, 405.

23. Mazauric, 251.

24. Schoenaers, 55 and n187.

25. Ibid., 172.

26. Levitt and Glick Schiller, 286.

27. Leo Tolstoy's novel *Anna Karenina* opens thus: "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way" (3).

28. The thriller mystery film *Rear Window* (1954), directed by Alfred Hitchcock, features a man—a professional photographer—confined temporarily to a wheelchair, who spends his days gazing through his window, watching his neighbors' domestic activities.

29. Lacan, 235.

30. See Yegenoglu 176 and 241 for a more pronounced discussion of Derrida's notion of hospitality.

31. Yegenoglu, 41.

32. Kassé, 268-270.

33. See Kétala 102-103.

34. Neville Hoad's analysis of the concept of international "rights" lends richness to our understanding of the global significances of Kétala's homophobic theme: "Lesbian and gay human rights circulate transnationally as an extremely uneven placeholder for a set of desires, anxieties, claims and counterclaims around modernity and cultural authenticity in the discourse of postcolonial nationalisms, which are themselves transnational. Within these national discourses, they are frequently described as a threatening imperialist import" (Hoad 69).

35. Schoenaers, 152.

36. See Rosemary Haskell, "Plotting *Migritude*: Variations of the *Bildungsroman* in Fatou Diome's *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* and *Celles Qui Attendent*." *South Atlantic Review*, vol. 81, no. 1, Spring 2016, pp. 136-156.

37. See Abel, Hirsch and Langland, eds., *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, "Introduction," (3-19), for a comparison between the masculine and feminine versions of the Bildungsroman mode in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

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About the Author

Rosemary Haskell teaches in the Department of English at Elon University in North Carolina. Her scholarly and teaching interests include British and World Literature and Global Studies. She is the editor, with Thomas Arcaro, of *Understanding the Global Experience: Becoming a Responsible World Citizen,* published by Pearson in 2010.

Disrupting the Lines: Tuning in to Edward Kamau Brathwaite's "Word Making Man"

John Hyland

so that we learn w/you the pleasure
of walking w/our roots across the country

—Edward Kamau Brathwaite, "Word Making Man"

Cuba's Casa de las Américas released an album, *Poemas,* of Edward Kamau Brathwaite reading his poetry in 1976.[1] The first track, "Word Making Man," is a poem addressed to the Afro-Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén. Two textual versions exist of the poem: a bilingual edition, published for the 1979 Caribbean Festival of Arts, Carifesta, held in Havana, and a revised (English-only) version, included in Brathwaite's *Middle Passages*, published in 1992. Through its multiple iterations this poem indicates that, beginning in the early 1970s after "Windrush" writers such as George Lamming came to prominence abroad in the 1950s, as well as in the wake of the turmoil of political independence in the 1960s, Anglophone Caribbean writers such as Brathwaite turned away from themes of exile, exemplified by writers such as Lamming, and toward the possibilities of a black diasporic poetics located in the Antilles. At first glance "Word Making Man" appears as a festschrift for Guillén, but through acts of "close listening," it emerges as an overlapping series of translations and re-soundings of Guillén's oeuvre that reflect upon and revise the points of entanglement and divergence that constitute the shifting grounds of black transnationalism during this period. This essay attends to those entanglements through analysis of both the printed and recorded versions of Brathwaite's "Word Making Man," addressing the interrelations of mediation, citation, and hybridity in black diasporic poetics and the possible ways that black diasporic writing emerges from the spaces between cosmopolitanism and sentimental imaginings of the nation-state.[2]

Brathwaite aurally reconstructs the circum-Atlantic world in "Word Making Man," troubling, testing, and exceeding the dialectics—roots/routes, orality/literacy, speech/noise, aural/visual, etc.—that persistently define critical accounts of black diasporic poetics. As my epigraph suggests, this poem lays bare the interplay between "itinerancy and identity," between "putting down roots or disclaiming them" (Moten, "Black Op" 1745). This essay studies that interplay by extending the concept of "close listening"—first proposed by Charles Bernstein as a way of formally attending to a poem's sonic elements—and proceeding from the understanding that the "sound" of a poem is inseparable from its historical, material, and performative contexts.[3] Whether listening to a recorded version or engaging the poem on the page, what one hears is always already shaped by a politics of listening wherein we are positioned by, what Jacques Ranciére calls, the "distribution of the sensible": the social and aesthetic regimes that determine what is heard or not heard, what registers as speech, as communicable sound, or blares as noise. In the shadows of capital and the haunting legacies of Atlantic slavery, race persists as one of—if not, *the*—dominant mode of such partitioning. As a sonic performance reverberating with the complex registers of black diasporic soundscapes, "Word Making Man" traces the contours of Guillén's oeuvre and imagines black cultures that are, as Hortense Spillers proposes, "the reclamation of the critical edge, as one of those vantages from which it might be spied, and no longer predicated on 'race'" (26).[4] "Word Making Man" sonically reclaims this edge through a citational practice that foregrounds the relationship between mediation, performance, and diaspora.

Recordings of poets reading their work are often treated as adjunct to the text or as if listening to one will unlock a poem's meaning. But a poet's voice is a construct, a sonic performance of a poetic personae, a sounding out of a potential self or selves: the poem, in this way, in its projection of subjectivities, is a site for imagining other futures or for recasting the past. A poem unfolds through an address to another, arcing toward an imagined community, and in doing so constructs a potential listener in its performance of a potential self. In his introduction to "Word Making Man" on *Poemas,* Brathwaite says: "I would like to begin by reading a poem I read for Nicolás Guillén when he visited us in Jamaica," restating the second part of the poem's title: "poem for Nicolás Guillén in Xaymaca." Brathwaite strongly emphasizes the preposition /for/, briefly holding the /r/ sound, which underscores that it was composed under the auspices of a specific historic moment. In this context, Brathwaite's use of possessive pronouns—in his introduction to the poem on the recording as well as in the textual versions—simultaneously signifies openness as well as differentiation. For instance,

when he introduces the poem—stating, when Guillén visited "us" in Jamaica—he marks a clear difference, but then in the text of the poem the possessive pronoun "we" largely replaces the lyrical "I" of Guillén's poetry. Brathwaite's voiced emphasis demonstrates the differing stakes of reading the poem versus listening to its voiced recording: a reading of the text would likely pass over the preposition in the title and potentially take for granted the significance of the possessive pronoun, which are both foundational to the poem's totality. While each version can be thought of as separate from the other, or autonomous, when taken together they amplify and disclose different aspects of this poem that vibrates in the tension between text and recording. That is, it is only by working closely with the different formats that we can get a feel for the poem's complex articulation of diasporic belonging as unfurling in the elided spaces between dominant binaries such as roots and routes.[5]

Rancière also elaborates on literature's disruptive possibilities, its power to articulate transformative social relations. Such possibilities depend upon modes of delivery. The manifold versions of "Word Making Man"—recorded, translated, printed, performed—speak to a thoroughly creolized poetics committed to communicating with, as well as creating and sustaining, postcolonial publics. In several essays written in the wake of the 1960s, Brathwaite addresses a clampdown. In *Contradictory Omens*, for instance, he discusses the difficulty of communication for postcolonial cultures because of neocolonial governing establishments, technological breakdown, and editorial decisions in publishing and broadcasting.[6] Furthermore, in "The Love Axe (1)," he opens by asserting that, despite the fact that "various establishments tried to prohibit . . . contact" between Cuba and the wider Caribbean, the Cuban revolution was "slowly revealing" to the "Caribbean matrix" a "folk or alternative tradition": neocolonial governments and imperial powers, he says, "could not effectively censor our listening" (20–21). "Word Making Man" responds to these systems of surveillance playing off the registers of Guillén's oeuvre. Brathwaite's poem sounds out the lines of flight for black diasporic citizens, troubling borders through acts of what I will call *constitutive disruption*. Through its productive disruption of lines—spatio-temporal, poetic, national, ontological, sonic, visual, and discursive—this poem provides an opportunity to ponder the possibilities of a black diasporic culture to come, possibilities that take shape in the pauses of the poem's translation, in the lag of its syncopation, and in the duration of its lines unfolding and dilating under duress.[7]

Listening, as Jean-Luc Nancy reminds us, is not analogous to understanding: "to be listening is always to be on the edge of meaning,"

he says, "as if the sound were precisely nothing else than this edge" (7). "Word Making Man" exists in—wrestles with, pushes—this sonic edge. It is a poem always in asymptotic approach of its full signification, always open to new takes and points of reception, and its multiple iterations demonstrate how this edge shifts, resounds, and resonates differently; its audible totality consists of an ongoing series of references, referrals, and citations that fold in upon themselves while simultaneously reverberating outwards. Citing and resignifying much of Guillèn's poetry—functioning as a kind of compendium-in-verse to the elder poet's vast body of work—this poem's citationality becomes its own form of sonic edge.[8] This edge amplifies the spaces between nations and folk cultures, for instance. In what follows, I offer an extended analysis of the entire poem, treating Brathwaite's amplifications and re-soundings of Guillèn's poetics by attending to the many layers of mediation—sound technologies, citation, translation—that are simultaneously embedded within the poem and within which it is embedded.[9] With the intention of showing how its various iterations signify the cultural work of poetry for black diasporic formations, I begin with the poem's closing section before jumping to its opening, working through all its sections, and then circling back to its closing—a movement meant to invoke the significance of the circle for Brathwaite's elaborations of black diasporic folk cultures in the poem.[10]

"Word Making Man" hinges Brathwaite's two major poetic trilogies.[11] With its turn toward Latin America, it marks a growing interest in influences buried within the trans-lingual Antillean orbit. Brathwaite's engagement with Guillén is part of his search for alternatives to the Anglo-European tradition as well as a turning away from Africa as source and toward the possibilities of a black diasporic Caribbean postcolonial poetics that emerges from an uneven mesh of traditions—West African, European, Latin, and African American, etc.—but is ultimately irreducible to any of them.[12] In the early 1970s, upon returning to the Caribbean (specifically, Jamaica) from England, the public role of the writer concerned Brathwaite. He began to develop a poetics that might articulate "the fragments/whole," as he says in *Contradictory Omens*, a historiographical account of creolization published in 1974.[13] "Word Making Man" is embedded within a (then-emergent) poetic discourse of creolization that allows Brathwaite to locate a heterogeneous folk; it is part of his ongoing project devoted to the submerged unities that might emerge from the clash of discrepant subjectivities. Given Guillén's massive stature in Cuba as a public poet invested in folk traditions, as well as his adherence to his theory of "*mulatez,*" it seems inevitable that Brathwaite would turn to him as a model for a creolized black diasporic poetics that stands in contradistinction to, for

instance, T.S. Eliot's elaborations of tradition and individual talent.[14] Even so, many critics overlook Guillèn's influence on Brathwaite, not to mention other Anglophone Caribbean and African American poets.[15]

Variations exist between the recording and the two textual versions—changes in cultural references, excised lines, revised stanzas—but the excision of a single letter from the 1992 print version is perhaps the most revealing: in the poem's closing stanzas, Brathwaite changes "therein" to "herein." This is the 1979 edition's closing section:

> so that we learn with you the pleasure
> of walking with our roots across the country
> owners **therein** of all there is to see
> owners **therein** of what we would believe
>
> of what our hands encompass as we dream
>
> so that together we say wind
> and understand its history of ghosts
>
> together, we say fire
> and again there is a future in those sparks
>
> together, comrade, friend
> we utter love
>
> and know at last it is our home
> now mine forever and so yours, amigo
> ours
>
> with the vast splendour of the sunbeam and the sunflower and the stars
> (lines 98–112)

This is the 1992 version from *Middle Passages* with the lines reorganized from floating free verse across the page to evenly aligned couplets and tercets:

> so that we learn w/you the pleasure
> of walking w/our roots across the country
>
> owners **herein** of all there is to see
> owners **herein** of what we would believe

of what our hands encompass as we dream

so that together we say wind
and understand its history of ghosts
together we say fire

& again there is a future in those sparks
together, comrade, friend
we say this is our land & know at last at last it is our home

now mine forever & so yours, *amigo*
ours
'w/ the vast splendor of the sunshine & the sunflower & the stars'
(lines 93–104)

This change in diction from the archaic "therein," which refers to something in another document or place, to the more formal "herein," which refers to the document in-hand, might be understood with Brathwaite's notion of "syllabic intelligence." He develops this concept in *History of the Voice* during the early 1980s as a way to talk about the interdependencies of the sound structures of language and lived historical experience. The excision of the /t/ suggests that the poem itself becomes a site, not only for imagining diasporic belonging, but also for its actualization. This turn toward language comments upon the poem's relationship to geography. While it generically references places ("country," "our land"), a specific locale is never named, suggesting that the place of "vast splendour" that is "home" rests just beyond the poem's fringe, as "therein" signifies, or perhaps, as the self-referential "herein" suggests, becomes the poem itself, the poem that is "the pleasure / of walking with our roots." One additional textual detail is worth noting: the change to the shorthand "w/" for "with" in the couplet, which creates an evocative image of the poem's actual words, in their materiality, hefting their roots upon their back, as if the slash were a backpack ("w/our roots").[16] This gestures toward how the mediated space of the poem is, for Brathwaite, a place to forge new versions of diasporic formations that synthesize binaries. It is also interesting to consider the slash's audibility that evokes perhaps a stutter or signifying sound beyond language, a form of sonic hybridity that underscores how the poem exceeds any binaries that might circumscribe it.

This closing section rewrites Guillén's "Tengo," directly quoted in the final line ("the vast splendor of the sunshine"). Functioning as a

bass line in "Word Making Man"—opening and closing it—"Tengo" shows how poetry, as a performative speech act, offers a transforming vision to formerly dispossessed black diasporic subjects, a key theme for Brathwaite. On the recording, which stays close to the 1979 edition, the tone of Brathwaite's voice drops its intensity at this section's start: the couplet begins at a low pitch, conversational, signaling this last movement. The performance then builds with the next couplet's repetition of "owners," and Brathwaite holds at the line breaks so that the voiced repetition intones the possibilities of sovereignty that the words signify. He also pauses at the caesura ("owners therein || of all there is to see"), emphasizing the projection of self-possession. He then too holds at the ending slant or oblique rhyme (see/believe) of the couplet, preparing us as listeners for the next line ("of what our hands encompass ...") where Brathwaite's voice momentarily drops off, enveloping it in silence just as it is offset in the 1979 version. It is a compelling line, evocative even if it is not semantically clear what the hands are encompassing through dream. The timbre of Brathwaite's voice is fullest in the closing tercet, repeating the phrase "so yours" before dropping onto the penultimate single-word line ("ours") that receives the most vibrant inflection in the closing section.

The poem's swirl of sounds is an extended riff on the Afro-Cuban *son,* a folk musical tradition fundamental to Guillén's poetics. Brathwaite takes his cue from its classic two-part structure where, after an opening verse that invites the audience to participate, a singer improvises an extended series of lyrical expressions within a call-and-response format. Adopting this structure, "Word Making Man" performs exchange and translation. Echoing the inviting first verse (or *largo*) of the *son,* it opens with an acknowledgement of the differences that articulate forms of diasporic belonging:

> Sir,
> not in 'Sir'
> but *compañero*
> as you wd prefer it in *hispañol*
>
> i have not been to cuba
> & do not know the language of yr *oradores*
> & as you said
>
> 'some of us are champions
> from the provinces, others
> *lo son olímpicos*.' & some of us
> are nothing—you will forgive me if i quote you again—

'not even *oradores*'

but i know that we are watching in a long circle for the dawn
& that the ruling class does not wait at bus stops
& i know that we are watching in a long circle for the fire
& that our *compradores* do not ladle soup out of the yabba
(lines 1–15)

On the recording, Brathwaite commences at a conversation pace, which he returns to in the closing section, as if speaking directly to Guillén; then, following a heavy pause after the third stanza ("'not even *oradores*'"), he intensely reads each line of the next quatrain, giving a full breath to each, rushing passed the caesura, yet holding at the line breaks. The quickened pace amplifies the stanza's urgency—its projection of an image of folk collectivity—suggesting that the poem's speaker turns away its initial addressee (Guillén) and toward a larger audience.

These opening stanzas cite Guillén's "Tengo" and "Oradores." "Tengo" can be initially read in the context of Guillén's return to Cuba in 1959 from exile after the flight of Fulgencio Batista; it is the title poem of his 1964 volume that met Fidel Castro's expectation for a literature that reflected the ideologies of the Cuban Revolution.[17] Here is the third stanza that Brathwaite folds into the opening of his poem:

I have, let's see,
I have the pleasure of going,
I, a peasant, a worker, a simple man,
I have the pleasure of going
(just an example)
to a bank and talking to the manager
not in English,
not as 'Sir',
but calling him 'compañero' as we say in Spanish
(lines 20–28)

Appearing in the wake of the success of the revolution, this poem "is a reaffirmation of revolutionary commitment from the new setting of a society that had made the decision to change its structure completely" (Ellis 147). Other poems collected in the post-revolutionary *Tengo* are not as celebratory, however: "It's All Right," for instance, which addresses the violence of U.S. racism and Cuba's "black brother of the crucified South," is an example of Guillén's continued investments in

black international solidarity. This poem, along with others such as "A Black Man Sings in New York," directly addresses the issue of statelessness, of being without land, a key theme in Guillén's oeuvre, which consistently indicts "the preposterousness . . . of the private appropriation of elements such as air, water, and sky" (Ellis 154). This trope of freedom as a given right, which burns and shines like the sun and stars in the sky, animates Brathwaite's entire poem; it is alluded to here in the line: "watching in a long circle for the dawn." "Oradores," the other poem cited in this opening section of "Word Making Man," appeared in Guillén's follow up volume to *Tengo*, *El Gran Zoo*, a bestiary written in the tradition of Neruda. Offering a searing critique of public speakers that function as mouthpieces and brokers for soft imperialism and multinational corporations, "Oradores," in Braithwaite's rewriting of it, offers an occasion to express—again, through the trope of dawn as a burning ember, a spark for freedom—the possible linkages of and for a black diasporic culture to come. Indeed, as these opening stanzas suggest, through its address to Guillén "Word Making Man" foregrounds questions of trans-cultural practices, giving a full sense of the linkages, overlaps, and divergences within black transnationalism and offering divergent framings of transnational blackness.

With his elaboration of self-possession and celebration of mobility after the revolution, the speaker of "Tengo" is "protean" and covers "the range of economic and social statuses" occupied by pre-revolution Cuban *men* (Ellis 150). It is not an accident that the speaking voice in this poem is gendered male. Indeed, gender is often restricted and flattened out in Guillén's work as well as Brathwaite's in the 1960s and 70s. For instance, in poems such as Guillén's "Muchacha recién crecida" ("New Brown Girl") and Brathwaite's "The Twist," the (black) female body is figured as the fragile state of the emerging postcolonial nation under threat from U.S. imperialism. Coming of age as a poet during the overt racism of the new Republic of Cuba, a racism that was overdetermined by U.S. imperialism and its segregationist social policies, Guillén first wrote under the influence of the "negrismo." This movement is often identified with Ramó Güirao, who edited the 1938 anthology *Órbita de la poesía negra afrocubana*, which framed the movement's tendency to assert a homogenous and deeply masculinist blackness. This tendency was similar to other movements of transnational black modernism, such as Aimé Césaire and Leopold Senghor's négritude, where the awareness of an African heritage supported the assertion of an autonomous poetic voice that imagined a new public: the oppressed black peoples of the global black diaspora. However, while these movements struggled to address the gendered complexities of black diasporic belongings, the beginnings are there for a more radi-

cally open poetics, the trace of an intention buried in the soundscapes of the black diaspora.[18] Guillén, for instance, did not fully embrace the racial essentialism of négritude, as is obvious in early poems such as "Ballad of the Two Grandfathers," which "goes to the heart of his *mulatez*, integrationist belief" (Hennessy 16–17). While Brathwaite's "Word Making Man" retains aspects of the masculinist underpinnings of Guillén's poetics—only male figures like Jose Martí and Jack Johnson are referenced, for instance—it rewrites and articulates the complexities of difference as much more than cultural nationalism's essentialisms. In this way, "Word Making Man" begins to turn away from a masculinist urge for revolution and toward coalition and points of convergence, offering a studied meditation on change as something other than resistance, as something other than assertion of an identity, but rather as disruption and rebuilding, as generative rupture.

Brathwaite first read "Word Making Man" when Guillén visited Jamaica in December of 1974, a visit that received "no fanfare," despite the political climate in Jamaica that was then largely determined, like much of globe, by the conflict between, to put it crudely, communism and capitalism (Irish 76). The recording of *Poemas* therefore becomes an audible archival trace of what might be called an event of statelessness. While Brathwaite's poem could be read as an ode to the success of Cuba as an established state, as an example of state sovereignty to the larger Caribbean world living in the shadow of U.S. imperialism, it is not so much lauding Cuba's independence—though this is certainly one of its registers—as much as it is speaking of the possibilities of black diasporic belonging across and between national and (post) colonial borders. While in Jamaica Guillén gave three readings to large audiences, and he gave the final one, which gathered an audience of nearly five hundred, with Brathwaite.[19] Thus, while Brathwaite's "Word Making Man" figuratively crosses and re-crosses the circum-Atlantic world, it is inseparable from a time of social and political upheaval in Jamaica.[20] This was, as Loretta Collins observes, a "noise-filled moment," a moment of decolonization initiated by the 1972 election of Michael Manley as Prime Minister (170). In this context, "the sounds of cultural resistance," as inflected by a long history of colonizing languages refashioned and "versioned" by creole and mediated by technology, "articulate a desire for self-determination" (170). Brathwaite's poetry and scholarship offer a rich opportunity to engage the ways that sound performs identities and modes of disruption while also suggesting alternative hybridities within the noise that arises from the violence of Atlantic modernity.

Guillén's influence can be heard in Brathwaite's tendency to elevate popular speech by adapting musical forms during this period.[21] This

tendency—a defining one for black diasporic poetics—was largely initiated by Langston Hughes's use of the blues and is evident in a range of work from Louise Bennett to Linton Kwesi Johnson.[22] It can be heard on the recording when Brathwaite's intonation and modulation overtakes the poem's formal elements: for example, as noted, when he passes over the caesura or holds at the line break instead of reading through it as is usually the case in poetic recitations. The recorded performance on *Poemas* sounds out a creolized speaking voice that is inflected by a sound-based poetics with occasional chant-like overtones. Guillén launched his sound-based poetics with the 1930 publication of *Motivos de Son*; two more collections followed: *Sóngoro Cosongo* (1931) and *West Indies, Ltd.* (1934), the latter of which contains the poem "Sensemayá," a key register and sonic contour of "Word Making Man."[23] Guillén's "Sensemayá" takes shape through the interplay of two stanza types—a refrain and narrative composed in the form of the *son*—in order to enact the magical snake ritual of the Mayombe sect that is the Cuban incarnation of a west/central African religious practice often identified as Yoruba. Subtitled "A chant for killing a snake," "Sensemayá" opens:

> ¡Mayombe-bombe-mayombé!
> ¡Mayombe-bombe-mayombé!
> ¡Mayombe-bombe-mayombé!
>
> The small snake has eyes of glass;
> the small snake comes, curls round a stick;
> with its eyes of glass, around a stick,
> with its eyes of glass.
> (lines 1–7)

Smart notes that the patterned repetitions of stressed and unstressed syllables in the *jitanjáfora* chorus's octosyllabic lines—patterns that displace standard poetic meter—resemble the opening *largo* of the *son*; they then blend into its *montuno* form, the melodic call-and-response section:

> Sensemayá, the snake,
> sensemayá.
> Sensemayá, with its eyes,
> sensemayá.
> Sensemayá, with its tongue,
> sensemayá.

Sensemayá, with its mouth,
sensemayá. (lines 19–26)

This poem's rhythm is an amalgam of the *son,* the Mayombe ritual, and the onomatopaic device of *jitanjáfora* often associated with the negrista poets. As a mode of sonic performance, rhythm elaborates black diasporic poetics with its improvisatory structure. Antonio Benítez-Rojo says that within the "Caribbean orbit" there is a very complex dynamic of polyrhythms that decenters power structures (16–19). This is a way to not simply resist but, in fact, transform the exploitative forces of empire, colonization, and imperialism. Keith Ellis therefore rightly locates an excess of "heightened feeling" in this poem's refrains of rhythmic *jitanjáfora*; the opening stanza's seemingly nonsensical, even untranslatable, chant, he claims, "becomes too imposing [throughout the poem] for the mere killing of a snake" (83–84).[24] The snake, he claims, is a saturated symbol that represents imperialism. In Brathwaite's poem, however, the snake is a multivalent image that winds its way through the second half of the poem's opening section. It continues with its address to Guillén—its version of a *largo*—by mixing the excess of "Sensemayá" with (at least) three other poems by him that deal with death and imperialism: "Guitar in D(Eath) Major," "Execution," and "Elegy for Camagüey":

in camagüey
ave maría
católica

silversmith turned silverfish. your father
in the leaves of the spanish classics. metallic needlework
in a tropic of paper. turblethumb thimbleprint journalist
who divined the omens of martí

when he was shot—*fusilamiento*
you became a snake
circling circling circling renewing yr circle of certainty

[...]

you tripped you cried you stumbled
on the dreams of those far off days:

nicotine lópez, yr pharmacist and friend
the town clerk cores and the cop who died his name like

canaan
what's his name?

& serafin toledo. blacksmith steel-lightening tailor
'& the school desk w/ the pen-knife scars
beneath a sky of fireflies & stars'

& we all learn
guitarra
we all learn

mayombe-bombe-mayombé
mayombe-bombe-mayombé

that one does not kill a brother
that one does not kill a brother
that one does not kill a brother

& look how *sensemayá* he is dead!
(lines 16–25, 29–45)

Allusions abound here; at times, in the spirit of Guillén's use of sound-based ritual chants, Brathwaite proceeds as much—or maybe *more*—by sound and rhythm as by sense and coherent meaning. Brathwaite's voicing on *Poemas* often intones the citations and quick shifts in subject matter that we see here in the text. In a nearly elegiac tone, he begins this section, slowly reading the opening tercet, and the quality of the recording itself—full of reverb and echo—inadvertently intensifies the timbre. The first two lines of the following quatrain, which recounts the murder of Guillén's father, is formally recited with heavy pauses at the caesuras and by reading over the line breaks. This shift in performative style might be heard as respect for the deceased. "Elegy for Camagüey," a poem that has not received as much critical attention as Guillén's other elegies, such as his "Elegy for Emmett Till," occupies much of the first half of this section. A poem of exile and nostalgia, "Camagüey" focuses on and commemorates loss with what Ellis terms a "combative attitude" that critiques the reasons for such loss (119). The poem recounts Guillén's dreamy return to his childhood when his father, a printer, was killed by the military while participating in a protest. This poem's return to a site of personal tragedy speaks to a broader experience of loss, an experience that Brathwaite, through his pastiche of several poems here, suggests as necessary to the composition of the ritualistic and sound-based poetics of poems like "Sensemayá."

Toward the end of "Camagüey," Guillén declares: "I come with my memories. / I come with my wounds and my verse." This may be why Brathwaite focuses so heavily on this typically overlooked poem; it attends to the wounds of memory that haunt forms of black diasporic writing. He incorporates, for instance, the image of "the school desk / full of pen-knife scars" from Guillén's poem as well as the firefly and star-filled sky. Such allusion suggests that despite (or maybe because of) the wounds of what Édouard Glissant calls the abyss, black diasporic poetics in Brathwaite's time reckon with the socio-political mechanisms that unnecessarily divide and exclude.[25] Such haunting signifies through metallic notes in "Word Making Man," a sound that also surfaces toward the close of "Camagüey." Brathwaite's performance makes audible the metallic details of this section—for example, "silversmith turned silverfish"—by holding on the /s/ sounds (which are, perhaps, reminiscent of a snake). This sounding reaches its apogee in the sonorousness of the second tercet, with its end-rhyme of "scars" and "stars" and its other strong /s/ syllables in "serafin," "blacksmith steel-lightening," "school," "sky," and "fireflies"—all of which Brathwaite pauses upon in his performance. This lingering creates a subtle rhythm that evokes Guillén's interests in "drum poetry," as in poems such as "Cante Negro" ("Black Chant"), a poem composed in black Spanish that he eventually rejected as contributing to forms of discrimination (Smart 55). This rejection is remarkably similar to debates that arose among other U.S. and Anglophone poets and novelists about writing dialect. Brathwaite's poem, however—as well as his performance of it—retains aspects of the rhythm and power of "drum poetry" without reifying racist constructions of black voice.

While Guillén was a—if not *the*—central public poet of the Cuban Revolution expressing critiques of U.S. imperialism in his poetry, his poetic vision was not limited to this context. He wrote poems that dealt with American Jim Crow and colonialism in Africa, for instance. Brathwaite amplifies this transnational aspect of Guillén's oeuvre, demonstrating the possibilities of a global black diasporic poetics that emerges out of Atlantic violence, out of the legacies of colonialism and the practices of imperialism: a poetics that not only critiques but also imagines modes of transformation and belonging. Take, for instance, the second section of "Word Making Man":

> Now we rock steady in the *orisha* of our dreams
> & yr name has become the *sunsum* of our ancestors
>
> to the pale salons of the *lippi* song you brought the *son*
> w/ the broad boa of the *conquistadore* violin you bent the

tree

jack johnson kid chocolate muhammad ali
them jazzers w/ cow-punches in their smiles

the stylish patent-leather shoes, the creaking
downstairs down the stares from broadway stretching

out 'its snout, its moist enormous mout
to lick and glut upon our canfields' vital blood'

black little rock. the mau mau. emmett till
guevara & the beaten skulls of biko & lumumba

you have whispered it all. you have uttered it all
coriolan of blood. plankton of melt & plangent syllables

sunrise *lucumi* sparkle

against yr teeth of joy
sus dientes de júbilo

amerika laughs
west indies west indies west indies ltd
(lines 46–64)

The rambling long lines of the first seven couplets are reminiscent of the *son,* showing how Brathwaite's poem disrupts often only to bring the notion of cohesion into impossible sharper relief. The poem's disruption takes place through rhythm and syntax—in the manner of the syncopations of the *son*—both of which put textual acts of signification under duress. These lines under duress also anticipate and prepare us—sonically set the scene, so to speak—for the transnational scenes of violence that we encounter here. Beyond this syntactical duress, time and place collapse here in a kind of diasporic temporal and spatial suspension or disruption. In the sixth couplet, for instance, we seamlessly move from 1957 Arkansas ("black little rock") to 1950s Kenya ("the mau mau") and then back across the Atlantic to 1955 Mississippi ("emmett till"); we then move south to Latin America ("guevara") and finally back across the Atlantic to 1977 South Africa and the 1961 Congo ("biko & lumumba"). With this litany, this naming of sites of violence within and across the black transnation, Brathwaite's poem actualizes

the relationship between violence and black diasporic subjectivity (an "*orisha* of our dreams"); the singing bloom of blood bleeds out into a sunrise that suggests cross-cultural contours ("*lucumí*"). And such phonographic articulation is achieved through a reverberation of embodied sound ("plangent syllables") and in a kind of optic biology ("plankton of melt"), an articulation that returns to the drum rhythms in the closing chant that incorporates Guillén's classic critique of U.S. imperialism and Cuban liberation, "West Indies, Ltd."

This essay has thus far attended to some of the ways that the sonic shapes and signifies in and through black diasporic poetics, which is not to suggest that sound is more critical than the visual in accounts of (black) subjectivities, but rather that "a (black) subject inhabits the spatiotemporal terrain between sonic modernity and visual modernity" (Weheliye 50). In "Word Making Man," this collision takes place, for instance, in the "creaking" of the "patent-leather shoes" that collide with the stares that stretch down Broadway. This drift of syntax plays out the collision of the sonic and optic in the urban spaces of America—but not only America. By playing out and improvising the "phonooptic black operations," which are "expressive of an autopoetic organization in which flight and inhabitation modify each other," "Word Making Man" prefigures several of the defining claims of Brathwaite's idea of "nation language" (Moten, "Black Op" 1745). Developed in response to Standard English as a defining feature of imperial oppression, nation language is not simply an effort to seize the language of the conqueror and replace it with a signifying system particular to the colonized place, nor is it only the product of an imminent orality, but rather a heteroglossic practice produced by one of the givens of modernity: contact among cultures. Demonstrating how nation language is a way to enact modes of relation in the face of the abyss that is the history of New World slavery, "Word Making Man" forges relations across the soundscapes of the black diaspora.

Brathwaite's recording of the album is evidence of the ways that technology allows sound to travel across vast distances, crossing national borders and offering mediated sonic spaces as points of convergence between seemingly disparate black diasporic formations within the circum-Atlantic world.[26] These technological iterations of the range of sounds that signify emergent (black) subjectivities constitute black diasporic soundscapes. The album itself, as material object, offers a version of diaspora at workable scale, which, at times, flies in the face of the poem's vast imagining of diaspora in the Atlantic World. In the closing section, however, the poem's scale begins to resemble the album as a channel between Cuba and Jamaica where "sea between us yields its secrets":

& yr voice rises like the moon
above the day of pigs. above the choruses of

who is it? who is it not?
the negro

who is it? who is it not?
my hunger

who is it? who is it not?
i&i talkin to ya

& the sea between us yields its secrets
silver into pellables into sheets of sound
that bear our pain & spume & salt & coltrane

saying
xangô

'no
not no
not bad
not bad, not velly bad'

but

yes
sí yes
bien
sí well
sí velly well

so that we learn w/you the pleasure
of walking w/our roots across the country
(lines 68–92)

An imagined dialogue of an interpellated black subject lays the groundwork for a return to the rhythmic /s/ sounds developed earlier in the poem. This is then followed by a textual performance of the interplay between exclusion and inclusion, a performance that is presided over by the Orisha Shango and that holds the timbre and shimmer of what Ira Gitler once called John Coltrane's "sheets of sound."[27] This invocation of Coltrane—which is absent on the recording and in the 1979

print edition—can be read as the endnote to an unpunctuated slide from an uncontainable expanse ("the sea between us") to a site that delimits the pain of that expanse ("spume & salt & coltrane"). Brathwaite seems to reserve his slowest and most measured voicing for this tercet; on *Poemas*, for instance, he inserts an additional caesura in the first line between "sea" and "between" —"the sea || between us || yields its secrets"—and also pauses slightly after "yields." This slide could also be read as an indictment, a rebuttal, or a co-opting of the ways that systems of domination in the South Atlantic System (to use Philip Curtin's term) were "characterized more by rupture and innovation than by the transfer and gradual modification of Old World institutions" (Palmié and Scarano 5). Through a global black diasporic poetics that is grounded in the Caribbean, it lays bare what Fernando Ortiz calls "contrapuntal forces": "jarring dissonances alternating with unforeseen harmonies" (qtd in Palmié and Scarano 9). This counterpointed reversal unfolds in the sounds and the soundings of Brathwaite's poem, in its actualization of the process of exchange and translation—that is, its constant re-imagining of the sonic edges of black diasporic poetics.

The term *African diaspora* has become a catch-all phrase for the immeasurable range of black experiences within—and *beyond*—the strictures of global modernity. Nahum Chandler has thus recently observed that "[t]here is no given horizon of thought or critical practice that is, or can be rendered, in its contemporary formation commensurate with the problematic named under the heading of the African Diaspora" (1). For Chandler, diaspora is a way toward "the cultivation of possibility . . . as both chance and freedom, but beyond both, and especially, as the illimitable" (2–3). While "Word Making Man" invokes points of convergence in a shared history rather than solely looking backwards and only participating in what Frantz Fanon once called "profound research," it also looks forward, turns toward a future whose ember—a dawning of a new sun—is fanned by a collective memory of what Glissant calls the abyss.[28] This poem thus exceeds two tendencies in accounts of what has been called cultural identity—on the one hand, the militant assertion of an imminent self, and on the other, a purely constructivist account—both of which tend to flatten out questions of difference within and between diasporic formations. "Word Making Man" is not "grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past," and it remains attuned to the ways that "we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, narratives of the past" (Hall 223–224). While a quick reading of Brathwaite's "Word Making Man" might conclude that it is a statement of a shared history, an assertion of cultural identity as an expression of points of belonging cut off by colonialism, this poem's sonic performance signifies a move toward a more radically open diasporic poetics.

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Notes

1. *Poemas* recording provided courtesy of the Stanford Archive of Recorded Sound, Stanford University Libraries.

2 See Moten's "The New International of Feeling" on these between spaces.

3. Other collections, such as Marjorie Perloff and Craig Dworkin's *The Sound of Poetry/The Poetry of Sound*, expand this concept, which elides the material and historical experiences of the "sound" of poetry. See Parry on this elision.

4. My term sonic performance offers a way to rethink sound, not only in terms of music and orality, but also in terms of mediation, embodiment, memory, and affect.

5. Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic,* famously emphasizing "routes, not roots," established the Atlantic as the prevailing unit of analysis and ushered in mobility as a dominant trend. It is now instituted, as a survey of courses and conferences makes clear: it is thus important to distinguish between *The Black Atlantic* as *an* account of the black diaspora and the "black Atlantic" as iterated by academic discourse. This essay intends to trouble any amalgamative analytic frame, deviating from the "black Atlantic." Many scholars, such as Edwards, emphasize Atlantic histories neglected by his abstract dialectic of roots and routes; others, such as Dayan, critique Gilroy's gendered, classed, and regionalized (i.e., North Atlantic) frame of analysis as excluding those unable to participate in cosmopolitan itinerancy.

6. He discusses this idea on pages 16-17.

7. For more on the idea of the "lag" see Weheliye 23; Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora* 13.

8. I am grateful to Lindsay Reckson for pointing this out.

9. Consisting of three sections and a little over one hundred lines, "Word Making Man" is not a "long poem"; it is nearly given in full here.

10. Stewart observes: "The cultural, or form-giving, work of poetry is to counter the oblivion of darkness [since] it is precisely in material ways that poetry is a force against effacement [. . .] The task of aesthetic production and reception [is] to make visible, tangible, and audible the figures of persons" (1–2).

11. The first is *The Arrivants*; the second is untitled and consists of *Mother Poem* (1977), *Sun Poem* (1982), and *X/Self* (1987).

12. Scott critiques Brathwaite's construction of Caribbean culture as "an adaptation carried out mainly in terms of African tradition" (Scott 107). "Word

Making Man," I contend, suggests that the sound structures of black diasporic poetics exceed such a desire to "supply a foundational past" (Scott 108). Brathwaite's "Word Making Man" locates an inherent hybridity of which Africa is but one element of a dynamic cultural complex. As Scott indicates, a discrepancy emerges here. Such a discrepancy, I would say, is not a result of what is responsible for the production of sound (e.g., Africa) but of how sound is heard. What is at issue, then, is not so much the politics of authenticity as the politics of listening.

13. The discourse on creolization is too vastly complex to effectively parse here: it is a term that has been appropriated and overgeneralized, and, as Palmié argues, should remain specific and regionalist. For Brathwaite's contribution to this discourse, in addition to *Contradictory Omens*, see *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*.

14. Benitez-Rojo notes: "Guillèn desired a Cuba that was "*mulata*"; that is, a form of nationality that would resolve the deep racial and cultural conflicts by means of a reduction or synthesis that flowed from the proposal of a creole myth; that is, the *mestizo* reality understood as "unity" (126). Or as Brathwaite proclaims in *Contradictory Omens*: "The unity is submarine" (64).

15. Warner-Lewis notes that critical studies of Brathwaite often overlook Guillén's influence and the Latin American literary tradition's fluid use of genres.

16. I am grateful to Andrew Friedman for pointing this out.

17. See Williams 115–118.

18. See, for instance, Badiane; Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*; and Torres-Saillant, 152-3.

19. Irish, 77.

20.The rising sun, a motif in "Word Making Man," is also on the logo for Michael Manley's People's Nationalist Party, which is Jamaica's democratic socialist party; it is not too difficult to imagine that the audience would have identified Brathwaite's motif as an expression of sympathy with Manley and PNP.

21. See Dawes.

22.Hughes met Guillén in Havana in the early weeks of 1930, and by nearly all accounts, he had a strong and immediate influence on him. The immediate result was the publication of eight poems in April of 1930, titled *Motivos de Son* ("*Son* Motifs"), that "created a furor in Havana." (Rampersad, vol. 1, no. 181). Also see Hennessy 15–16 and Smart 32–34.

23. Another sonic contour is the Mexican composer Silvestre Revueltas's 1938 symphonic translation of Guillén's poem; half-instances of the Mexican composer's name punctuate Brathwaite's poem.

24. See also Kutzinski 136-43.

25.Elucidating literature's powerful ability to articulate the contradictory intricacies of black diasporic cultures, Glissant details the "abyss"—initiated by the experience of the Middle Passage—that animates forms of black diasporic belonging, an abyss of the absolute unknown [...that] in the end became [...] a freeing knowledge of Relation with the Whole" (5–7).

26.See Redmond on black diasporic soundscapes.

27.Gitler first used this phrase in his 1958 liner notes to Coltrane's *Soultrane*; he used it again in his article for *Down Beat* later that same year. I am grateful to Damien Keane for pointing this out.

28.On Fanon see also Hall (221–222) who uses Constance Farrington's 1963 translation of *The Wretched of the Earth* for Grove Press, which differs from the Philcox translation cited here, and uses the phrases "passionate" and "profound research."

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About the Author

John Hyland currently teaches at Germantown Academy. He was previously a Writing Fellow at Haverford College. Fellowships from the W.E.B. Du Bois Library at the University of Massachusetts and the Schlesinger Library at Harvard University have supported archival research for his current book project, *Atlantic Reverberations: The Sonic Performances of Black Diasporic Poetries.*

Diaspora Doubtful: Illegible Diasporic Subjects in Claude McKay's *Banjo* and Nadifa Mohamed's *Black Mamba Boy*

Marina Bilbija

> In these cases the Home Office does not accept the applicant's claimed nationality, but cannot be satisfied on the basis of all the available documentary and oral evidence that the applicant is a national of another country and/or the Home Office has no evidence that they are removable to another country/territory
>
> (UK Visas and Immigration Guidelines, 2013)

> "We all mixed. I'm so mixed up I don't know what I am myself."
> "You don'? I always wonder, Latnah what you really are. Except for the Chinese, I don't feel any physical sympathy for Orientals . . . always feel cold and strange and far away from them. But you are different. I feel close to you."
>
> (Banjo, 1929)

Claude McKay's *Banjo* is a novel riddled with doubt. For Ray, the novel's designated intellectual, doubt is an ethical orientation toward the world borne out of travel and honed by "observing and appreciating the differences of human groups, and making contact with earthy blacks of tropical Africa" (McKay 324). His "intellectual prerogative of doubt" manifests itself as a deep skepticism toward any kind of provincialism or nationalism (324). A different kind of doubt, imposed by the French and British Imperial States, underwrites the condition of the novel's other protagonists. Having lost their passports and identification papers, and being "unable or too ignorant to show exact proof of their birthplace," black and brown British colonial subjects are outfitted with so-called "nationality doubtful" papers, and are instructed to

go back to homelands they no longer remember (ibid). Ray's Nigerian friend, Taloufa, himself a "nationality doubtful," observes that by virtue of their being stranded together in Marseilles and their shared fear of deportation, Africans, South Africans, West Indians, Arabs, and Indians are now "all mixed together" (McKay 312). Doubtfulness is thus a condition of Marseilles' racial lumpenproleteriat.

The spatial intimacy and economic inter-dependence of Marseilles' racial others occasions the unlikely union between Latnah, an ambiguously racial "Oriental" prostitute, and the novel's black protagonists, Ray, Banjo, Goosey, Ginger, Taloufa, Dengal, and Malty. She first befriends the black vagabonds after Malty intervenes on her behalf during an altercation with an aggressive pimp. She repays this act of kindness with affective labor—friendship and unwavering affection, as well as gifts and favors. As Malty notes, "eveh since she pals out with our gang, nevah passing us without speaking, no matter ef she even got a officer on the string, and always giving us English and American cigarettes and a little change when she got 'em" (10). The polyglot Latnah proves to be an invaluable resource for the drifters; she finds them jobs, feeds them, and helps them navigate the social networks of the Ditch; in return, they offer her protection.

Though they accept Latnah as "a pal," the male protagonists nevertheless emphasize her alterity by referring to her as either "Arab," "Oriental," or "Indian." The sheer range of ethnicities projected onto Latnah invites a hermeneutic of readerly suspicion as to the reliability of these accounts. Indeed, at the end of the novel, Latnah reveals that the only knowledge she has of her lineage is that her mother was a "Negresse" (283). However, her revelation does not cement her belonging in the group as a new-found diasporic member. Rather, in the next chapter, the men leave Marseilles in pursuit of new adventures, leaving Latnah behind. This essay examines the geopolitical factors that relegate Latnah to the status of the group's racial and cultural outsider—one who can only ever be incorporated as an exceptional and liminal member of the African diaspora—despite her African heritage.

While scholarship on *Banjo* has typically theorized the practices of diasporic belonging from the vantage point of its black male characters, I explore the conditions of possibility for mutual diasporic recognition from its epistemological limit: the hyper-Oriental, crypto-African Latnah. Latnah's case illuminates not only the opaqueness of so-called "Afro-Orientals" to New World blacks but also the different ways in which these geographically-dispersed subjects understand their relationship to blackness. For instance, Latnah does not experience her black maternity and her repeated interpellation as Arab, Indian, and

"Oriental" as discontinuous. By contrast, the black male protagonists cite her "Orientalness" as exclusive of blackness.

In re-reading what Brent Hayes Edwards has referred to as *Banjo*'s "grammar of blackness" through the novel's crypto-African character, I take my cue from Somalian-British novelist Nadifa Mohamed whose novel *Black Mamba Boy* (2010) revisits McKay's vagabonds in 1940s Marseilles. In a 2011 interview, Mohamed acknowledged *Banjo* as the Ur-text to *Black Mamba Boy*, referring to the 1929 novel as "my novel 70 [*sic*] years ago" (120). She establishes this connection explicitly in *Black Mamba Boy*'s final chapter when her main character, Jama, encounters *Banjo*'s vagabonds. In Mohamed's revisionist novel, Latnah is brought back into the fold of the diaspora when Jama recognizes her as a compatriot of his "Abyssinian" North African wife. When read together, these novels reveal the difficulties of naming, and by extension, producing a legible narrative account of a hybrid Afro-Arab female from the Horn of Africa within the frameworks of African diaspora and black internationalism. I show how Mohamed's attempts to reinstate Latnah as a black diasporic subject eclipse her role as a racial conjunction between black, Arab, and Oriental worlds in the ur-text.

Malty, Banjo, and Ray's inability to conceive of Latnah as anything but a so-called Oriental outlier is a perfect example of what Brent Hayes Edwards has called diasporic décalage, "the received biases that refuse to pass over when one crosses the water" (14). Out of this inter-diasporic misprision, Latnah's Oriental identity is fabricated. Just as the British state generates Taloufa's "nationality doubtful" status without consulting his understanding of his place in the world, in order to taxonomize, process, and exclude him, the male protagonists reproduce Latnah's alleged alterity by imposing a range of different "Oriental" labels onto her, including Arabian, Indian, and Persian. For all purposes, Latnah is diaspora doubtful.

By drawing an analogy between dubious participations in nation and diaspora, I do not presume that the effects of intra-diasporic illegibility are somehow commensurate with the violence of exclusion from the state or deportation. Rather, my analogy indexes the contingent and multiplies determined definitions of blackness and diasporic belonging in the early-twentieth-century Anglophone world. Latnah's attempts to articulate to the African-diaspora and to challenge her friend's definitions of racial community are obfuscated by both her imputed Orientalness and her gender. I recover Latnah's eclipsed Afro-Oriental practice of diaspora and argue that the novel stages these two different geo-political expressions of blackness, the legible diasporic practices of the male vagabonds, and the illegible ones of the Afro-Oriental outsider. These map onto two different understandings of

racial solidarity: one based on cultural affinities and the other on politico-economic exigencies. Through this tension, McKay importantly illuminates the multiple ways in which subjects enter, belong, and unbelong to racially-structured social formations."[1]

Banjo's Hyper-Oriental/Crypto-African Diasporic Subject

Throughout the novel, Latnah's exceptional status in the vagabond crew is attributed to first, her putatively Arab and Oriental traits, and second, to her gender. In the eyes of her male friends, these two aspects of her identity combine to make her more pointedly alien and more desirable. For Malty, Latnah is the specter of "his exotic, almost forgotten" Indian schoolmate (36). As such she enters an economy of desire in which her otherness is fetishized and cited as the *a priori* explanation for any unfamiliar behavior that she may manifest or any unpopular view that she may offer. By tracking the inconsistencies in Banjo and Malty's depictions of Latnah's Orientalness, I interrogate the fantasy and the discursive production of Latnah as the group's internal racial other.

Concurring with the narrator that, "Negroes and Arabs are not fond of one another," the novel's black male protagonists are flattered that Latnah chooses to associate with them rather than their Arab counterparts with whom, they claim, "she was identified by language and features" (27). This statement establishes the tautological cultural and racial logic of her alterity; in fact, any knowledge that the reader may glean about Latnah's motivations—or whether she herself acknowledges this identification with Arab men—is filtered through her male cohorts and the narrator. The implied subject of the clause modifying the noun phrase "Arab men"— "with whom she was identified by language and features"—is not Latnah but an implied generic subject of the passive verb. Who has identified her with one group as opposed to another, and has judged her features and language more akin to the former is not stated. Later in the novel, we learn that she has no knowledge of having Arab descent since she only knew her black mother and never met her father. Thus, as Jacob Berman astutely points out, her Arabness is pure speculation (*American Arabesque* 76). The vagabonds' surprise at the unlikeliness of Latnah's preference thus stems from their unreliable reading of her physiognomy and linguistic performances.

Since she is not provided with an opportunity to give her own account of her lineage until the very end of the novel, Latnah is interpellated according to the incomplete information that the black vaga-

bonds gather from her fluency in multiple languages and her physical appearance. In fact, her reputation as an ambiguous "Oriental" precedes her first appearance in the novel. When Malty first mentions her to Banjo he introduces her as a "li'l woman bummin' like us on the beach," who has helped them and proved herself a good friend to the men. But no sooner does he identify Latnah as "like us" than he proclaims her to be racially illegible, admitting that he cannot tell "whether she is Arabian or Persian or Indian" (12). Four pages later, the narrator describes her as "a little olive-toned woman of an indefinable age, clean-faced, not young and far from old, with an amorous charm round her mouth" (16). Her olive skin provides little information about her racial background, given that the novel takes place in the South of France, and that a prostitute with "Arab" coloring is revealed to be a Provençal woman.

The narrator's gaze lingers on the new character, running first over Latnah's "olive-toned" face, skimming her to appraise her age, only to dart back to her mouth. Zooming in and out of her face like a camera, the narrator invites readers to follow his gaze without ever actually focusing the lens in one spot. As a result, we get a blurry "clean-faced" woman with olive skin but no features. Even her mouth—a focal point of narratives of racial detection—tells us more about her desirability to the beholder than about the mouth itself. The manner in which the narrator's gaze bounces off Latnah's face and body without being able to clearly delineate them figures her as a reflective surface.

Latnah's introduction prefigures the various projections that the other characters will later impose on her. Indeed, Malty and Banjo's readings of Latnah's background, race, and affiliations prove to be mainly conjecture. *Banjo* thus lays bare the male characters' attempts to sustain the fictions of Latnah's alterity, constantly revealing inconsistencies in their hyperbolic accounts of her perceived difference and eliciting readerly doubt. An early example of the men's fabrication of difference can be found in Chapter three, "Malty Turned Down" when Malty balks at the discovery of Latnah's concealed dagger. Rendered through Malty's point of view, this scene invokes the tropes of an Oriental story and casts Latnah as its dangerous-yet-titillating heroine: "She slipped from her bosom a tiny argent-headed dagger, exquisitely sharp-pointed, and showed it to Malty. He recoiled with fear and Latnah laughed. A razor or a knife would not have touched him strangely. But a dagger! It was as if Latnah had produced a serpent from her bosom" (29). Malty's erotically charged account of Latnah brandishing a dagger blurs the boundaries between the aesthetically pleasing yet terrifying object and the woman holding it. When his gaze returns to Latnah's breasts it also takes in her dagger and the imagined

serpent nestled between them, her feminine charms betraying a concealed phallic instrument. It is at this moment, when she appears to him as both hyper-feminine and monstrously unfeminine, that Malty's sexual interest in her is ignited.

Malty's erotically charged description of the hidden dagger reveals that the fantasy of Latnah's real or perceived alterity is key to this desire. According to Malty, the dagger "was not an instrument familiar to his world, his people, his life," yet the stream of associations that it elicits suggest otherwise (29). The dagger was one of the most recognizable props carried by actors playing "Oriental" villains on the stage and it was widely featured in almost every orientalist representation of Arabs and Turks in the Western world. As such, it is an immediately recognizable exotic trope rather than an unfamiliar object.

Malty's professed ignorance of all things Oriental is immediately contradicted in the next paragraph, where he reminisces about the Indian communities that he encountered as a child: "She made him remember the Indian coolies that he had known in his West Indian Island when he was a boy. They were imported indentured laborers and worked on the big sugar plantation that bordered on his seaside village. The novelty of their strangeness never palled on the village" (30). Whereas the first images that the dagger conjures in Malty's mind are stock scenes from sensationalist Orientalist stories, these associations spring from his actual experiences with Indians living in the Caribbean. After commenting on the Indians' sartorial habits, and cataloguing their turbans, loin-cloths, and bracelets, he speculates about their cultural legacy in the West Indies, noting that "perhaps they had unconsciously influenced the Negroes to retain their taste for bright color and ornaments that the Protestant Missionaries were trying to destroy" (30). From Malty's conjecture about Indian influences on West Indian aesthetics and his vivid childhood memories of an Indian classmate we glean a history of intimacy between these communities. It is unclear, however, to what extent he locates Latnah in this racial landscape. What about Latnah reminds him of the Indian schoolgirl? Does he read her as Indian, too, or does he yoke them into some kind of pan-Asian/pan-Oriental ideal?

Malty's musings on his past reveal that, contrary to his various previous statements, his attraction to Latnah is predicated on a particular kind of familiarity. The narrator concedes that "Malty's boyhood memories undoubtedly played a part of his conduct toward Latnah. He could not think of her as he did about the women of the Ditch. He felt as if he had long lost sight of his exotic, almost forgotten schoolmate, to find her become a woman on the cosmopolitan shore of Marseilles" (31). His fantasy of Latnah as the adult version of his Indian schoolmate

fuses the familiar with the exotic, and the domestic with the foreign. This fantasy perfectly encapsulates Latnah's symbolic status as the group's internal other; her liminal and partial inclusion in the group is a repetition of former disavowals of internal difference.

Banjo commonly cites Latnah's foreignness as an explanation for her incorrect surmisal of race-relations. Her "Oriental" background becomes the ground on which he dismisses her attempts to argue for a practice of racial solidarity based on economic solidarity rather than cultural affinities (the latter being his own position.) For example, after nursing Banjo through an injury, she asks to accompany him the next time he plays the banjo for an audience, in order to "take up a collection" which presumably the two will share (19). He initially agrees to this arrangement but after the first successful collection he becomes irritated by her "instincts of acquisitiveness" (25). She, in turn, accuses him of "mak[ing] the white fool you all the time" by letting pride and romantic ideas about art get in the way of his being remunerated for his labor. Banjo wins the argument and continues to play for free, all the while depending on Latnah for "a free bed, free love, and wine" (46). Their second major altercation occurs when she catches Banjo flirting with an old fling, a white prostitute who had robbed him in the past. She treats this dalliance differently from his other conquests, viewing it as a confirmation of his objectionable preference for white women. She even accuses him of "prefer[ring] help ofay than colored boys" and admonishes him for his lack of race-pride: "you no proud of race, no like your own color" (175).

On both occasions, Latnah remonstrates against Banjo's blindness to white exploitation of black affective labor and resources. Her politico-economic understanding of the meanings and practices of racial solidarity is contrasted by his cultural and implicitly homosocial one based on aesthetics—the shared enjoyment of music, memory—shared experiences of oppression, and an intangible definition of blackness, from which Latnah is, by default, excluded. Unlike the other vagabonds, whose visible markers of blackness and cultural affinities qualify them as members of the inner circle by default, Latnah's entry into the group is occasioned by acts of mutual solidarity—Malty's protection of her on the beach, and her gifts of cigarettes and favors. Here it is important to note that Latnah responds to Malty's individual act by extending her gratitude, friendship, and favors to his entire group, that is the novel's Afro-diasporic community. Thus from the onset, Latnah codes these individual relations as metonymic of larger group dynamics. I wish to argue that Banjo and Latnah's disagreements stage—without ever resolving—the tension between two opposing conceptions of racial belonging, one centered on cultural affinities, and the other on

politico-economic exigencies. But given Latnah's status as a romantic interest, and the explanatory power of her foreignness, her two successive politico-economic articulations of diasporic belonging are not recognized as such. Instead they are merely discounted as the idiosyncratic rantings of a scorned woman.

By highlighting the allegorical political stakes of Latnah's complaint, I do not wish to disentangle it from the economy of desire in which she, Malty, Banjo, and Ray operate. It is no accident then that the only time Banjo acknowledges Latnah as a black woman, he intends it as an insult that ends their affair. "I don't want no black woman come messing me up," he tells her, warning her not to harass him and his (white) women anymore (175). Michelle Stephens reads this exchange as symptomatic of the marginalization of black women from the novel's vision of black globality. She notes that when Latnah is labeled a black woman—even if only fleetingly—her outsider status is made even more palpable than when she is coded as Oriental or Indian. Her contention is that "black men renounce nationality and domesticity by leaving behind the woman of color" (*Black Empire* 59). In other words, in order for the men to bypass the conventional marriage plot in favor of homosocial ties with other black vagabonds, black women are written out of the novel's version of black internationalism. When Latnah begins to approximate domesticity, she too is renounced. This is why she cannot sail away with them at the end of the novel and join their ever-mobile black homosocial community permanently.

The homosocial parameters of Banjo's internationalism are crystalized in the novel's final paragraph, where Banjo rationalizes his decision to not invite Latnah to leave Marseilles with the rest of the group as a problem of gender and mobility. "A woman is a conjunction," he states matter-of-factly, "Gawd fixed her different from us in moh ways than one. And theah's things we can git away with all the time and she just kain't" (326). What I am suggesting is that it is precisely her role as a gendered conjunction—the condition for the gathering of black masculine international assemblages that cannot ever entirely recognize or incorporate her—that makes it even possible for her to be included temporarily in the circle of black vagabonds. During the course of the novel it becomes clear that the grounds on which she is excluded from the male protagonists' black internationalist formation—her gender and her perceived Orientalness—render her an acceptable, if temporary sojourner. She cannot be inducted into the group as a black woman since, as Stephens has demonstrated in her readings of his novels, black femininity is associated with domesticity in McKay's canon.[2] Appositely, the men would not welcome her if

she were an *Arab man,* given their insistence that black and Arab men "don't get along" (173).

The stakes of Latnah's exclusion from legible forms of blackness and from the novel's central vision of homosocial black internationalism become crystalized in McKay's rendition of her racial reveal scene. In the following section I read the anti-climactic fall-out of Latnah's racial revelation as symptomatic of the novel's intellectual prerogative of doubt, to borrow Ray's term, towards the explanatory power of racial genealogy.

Latnah's Plot

Published in a period characterized by fictional tragic mulatta heroines and ubiquitous passing plots, the non-event of Latnah's coming out as part black de-sensationalizes the fact of blackness. In US-based fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century, bodies of mixed-raced characters are plot-generating mechanisms in their own right. In a time when intra-racial marriage was still illegal, the hybridly-raced body was automatically inscribed with an illicit romantic plot—or worse, seduction, exploitation, and disinheritance.[3]

Latnah's unexpected divulgence of her African lineage in the penultimate chapter has all the trappings of a racial confession denouement characteristic of the passing novels of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century. Ray is the first character to directly ask Latnah about her ambiguous racial background instead of merely imputing it. In his attempt to communicate his regard for her, Ray establishes a hierarchy between different types of "Oriental" subjects, noting how "Except for the Chinese, I don't feel any physical sympathy for Orientals" (283). Whereas he feels "cold and strange and far away" from the latter, he recognizes her, a presumed Oriental, as somehow exceptional (ibid). "You are different," he explains, "I feel close to you" (ibid). After being referred to as an indeterminate Oriental in the novel's preceding two hundred and eighty pages, Latnah casually responds that her mother was "a Negresse . . . Sudanese or Abyssinian, I no certain" (McKay 284).

The effects of this closure distinguish *Banjo* quite clearly from the classic passing novel. For instance, when in Jesse Fausset's *Plum Bun* (1929) the heroine Angela announces that she is black, she is simultaneously rehabilitated into the black community and alienated from her white contacts. Furthermore, her status before the law is completely transformed, to her detriment. Latnah's disclosure has no such consequences. She does not automatically become legible as a member of the African diaspora, nor does her secret Blackness alienate her from

her pan-Arabic circles in Marseille. Remarkably for a novel written about black internationalism, her blackness is never mentioned again.

One of the implications of Latnah's exceptionality is that U.S.-based, or even more broadly, New World epistemologies of blackness do not seamlessly extend to Marseille. In *Plum Bun* all the characters reside in the United States and are privy to its particular racial taxonomies, whereas *Banjo*'s characters hail from different empires with distinct histories of racial formation. Because she is almost uniformly interpellated as vaguely "Oriental," and sometimes more specifically as Arab or Indian, she fails to register as black to her African American friends and lovers, despite the fact that in their home country black maternity is *the* locus of blackness. Under these conditions, the relationship between the African American, Nigerian, and West Indian characters, and the hyper-Oriental, crypto-African is fraught with moments of mutual misrecognition.

Second—and perhaps more crucially—the definitions of blackness that apply in *Plum Bun* are redundant or inapplicable to already racialized bodies. Indeed, one of the key differences between Angela and Latnah is that one is presumed to be white and the other Oriental (and thus already *non-white*). This suggests that from the perspective of a black internationalist assemblage, it is difficult to conceive of Latnah as simultaneously Black and "Oriental," even though, paradoxically enough, the novel makes several mentions of "Black Arab" characters, such as "Arab-black girl from Algeria" (46).

In a reversal of the racial script of 1920s US fiction and law, wherein subjects of mixed white and black ancestry by default become racialized as black, Latnah's blackness is overridden by her hybrid and doubtful status. Moreover, by stating that "we all mixed up," Latnah posits her hybrid status as the norm rather than the exception, suggesting that even her black comrades are "mixed" (283). As a token of his agreement with Latnah's judgment, Ray shares a family anecdote about his alleged East African and Fulah origins. According to Ray, the defining features of his ancestors were "reddish" skin and "glossy hair" and heavy features "like some Armenians," which he identifies as the shared characteristic of certain East African and African physiognomies (282). Despite his casual reference to Armenian features, he argues that these people "weren't mixed," or at least "not as we know it between black and white today. Perhaps way back" (282).

For Ray, "mixed" automatically signals black and white racial admixtures; in order to index a hybrid African identity that predates the European colonization of Africa, or the inter-racial mixing in the Black Atlantic, he first denies the possibility of mixture, only to concede its possibility "way back" (284). The way that Ray maps different histories

of racial formation and racial mixing relegates black-white mixtures as modern and African-continental ones as pre-modern and somehow constitutive of blackness. In so doing, he affirms Latnah's argument that all of them are "mixed," but assigning different values to a hybridity constituted in relationship to whiteness and one resulting from inter-continental African and cross-colored mixing.

By giving Latnah's final appearance in the novel all the trappings of a racial reveal, only to empty it of any narrative significance, McKay satirizes the racial detection logic of early twentieth-century bio-political regimes. The significance of the anti-climactic resolution of this plot line has been eclipsed in contemporary scholarship by the focus on the novel's evasion of the marriage plot. But the marriage plot is not the only plot that evades Latnah. If Latnah's presence does not produce a plot per se (given the novel's *a priori* disavowal of plot in its title) it certainly produces action: sexual rivalries and misunderstandings. Any linear or causal narratives about Latnah herself, however, are consistently foreclosed.

The challenge of theorizing diasporic belonging from the perspective of subjects constituted in multiple overlapping ethnic groups and hailed by multiple racial names was articulated most poignantly in Earl Lewis's seminal 1995 essay, "To Turn on a Pivot: Writing African Americans in the History of Overlapping Diasporas." Lewis argues that in order to take race seriously, scholars must "theorize and historicize how racial identity informs individual identity and how identity formation in turn informs racial construction—in a sense, we must take the processes of community-building seriously" (783). However, in order to make sense of how communities are built, scholarship on race and diaspora must also take into account the intersectional and multi-positional identities of its members. He points to the example of Arthur Schomburg, the celebrated African American bibliographer and historian who initially entered the United States from Puerto Rico under the name Arturo Alfonso Schomburg. Lewis notes that the son of a Virgin Islander woman and a German man "found safe quarter and employment in New York City's multi-hued Puerto Rican and Cuban communities" and that only later on "moved into the world of black Americans" with whom he would subsequently be primarily associated (785). According to Lewis, in order to give a robust account of Schomburg's life and legacy, the historian must engage with the effects of his social and intellectual formation in these two overlapping networks—or as he puts it, he must be able to write the "history of how Arturo became Arthur and yet remained Arturo" (785).

While there has been much important scholarship in the direction of Lewis's conceptual model of overlapping diasporas, this body of

work has, for the most part, neglected the narrative implications of the conundrum that he highlighted in 1995.[4] Lewis's question—how does one tell the story of how individuals and groups are constituted across multiple diasporas without prioritizing either set of affiliations—is essentially a question about historiography, and by extension narrative (785). Lewis's overtures in the direction of a narrative account of overlapping diasporic belonging suggest that this process takes place across two different temporalities. This is evidenced by his verb choices: "to become" and "to remain." On the level of narrative this requires the historian to represent the conjunction between the temporality of "becoming" a denizen of one diasporic community ("how Arturo became Arthur") and his or retention of ties to another ("yet remained Arturo").

Latnah's example suggests that Lewis's conundrum about the historiography of overlapping diasporas extends to fictional representations, too. In *Banjo* any attempt to give an account of Latnah's origins, affiliations, or even the facial features that may (falsely) associate her with a particular group that is not clearly filtered through the consciousness of her male cohorts produces a narrative blockage. Read in the context of Lewis's question, McKay's novel highlights the difficulty of rendering how subjects are constituted in overlapping diasporas through narrative forms like the novel, which cannot adequately represent two temporalities of belonging—how one becomes yet remains—at the same time.

Latnah's unstoried presence in the novel is starkly contrasted by the proliferation of stories about black seamen. As Ginger points out, "There ain't a jack man that ain't got a history to him as good as any that evah was printed" (168). In her reading of the novel, Michelle Stephens notes that the histories to which Ginger alludes are specifically *oral histories* "submerged beneath the national print cultures of the twentieth-century Western imperial world" (*Black Empire* 183).

Whereas all the "jacks" have stories "as good as any that evah was printed," Latnah, the only character who is clearly not a jack, has no back-story or plottable future. Or rather, *because* she is not a jack she is not a storied "nationality doubtful." According to Banjo, by virtue of being a woman, Latnah is a "conjunction" and thus cannot sail away in anticipation of new stories. As a conjunction, she enables the congregation and then the dispersal of the black male vagabonds—the conditions for black internationalism—but cannot travel herself. Put in narrative terms, conjunctions do not have stories of their own because they are a means of propelling narrative.

The narrative-less conjuncture poses difficulties for a revisionist historian or novelist in pursuit of recovering the histories of the jack's female counterparts. British-Somalian writer Nadifa Mohamed's *Black*

Mamba Boy tackles this very problem head-on by reanimating McKay's Latnah and transposing her briefly into the diagesis of her own novel on black internationalism. In what follows, I examine how the political stakes of Latnah's recognition as an Afro-diasporic subject change depending on whether she is figured as a conjunction or as storied woman.

Latnah Redux: *Black Mamba Boy* rewrites *Banjo*

Taking their cue from *Banjo*'s treatment of Latnah's racial revelation as a non-event, literary critics have predominantly referred to Latnah as ambiguously raced, or reproducing the terminology of the novel's male character, have dubbed her Arab, "Oriental," and in some cases, even Indian. By contrast, Nadifa Mohamed's *Black Mamba Boy* posits Latnah as an African woman, making no references to her speculative Orientalness. Towards the end of the novel her protagonist, Jama, disembarks from his ship in Marseilles and ends up in the Ditch, famously memorialized by McKay. As Jama moves through the Ditch, passing by landmarks familiar to readers of *Banjo* and, stopping at the very same Senegalese-owned Black Bar in which much of the 1929 novel's action takes place, the boundaries between Mohamed's diegetic world and McKay's are blurred. That this is Banjo's diegetic world becomes clear when he meets an "American named Banjo" who introduces him to the rest of the novel's cast: "Ray, Dengel, Goosey, Bugsy, and a pretty Abyssinian girl called Latnah" (Mohamed 253).

By staging an encounter between *Banjo*'s and *Black Mamba Boy*'s characters, Mohamed establishes the former as the framework within which to read the latter's discourse on global blackness. Jama does not just meet McKay's characters, he inhabits their narrative world and participates in the everyday actions that constitute their particular practice of diaspora. The *mise-en-scene* within which this encounter takes place is lifted directly from McKay's novel—the bar is the same, the company is the same, and once there, Jama does what *Banjo*'s characters typically do at night: dance.

Ian Christian Foster understands Mohamed's swapping of Latnah's illegible and hybrid origins for legibly Abyssinian ones as a black feminist rehabilitation of Latnah into the fold of the African diaspora, and, by extension, *Banjo*'s black vagabond international (90). Jama's fleeting recognition of Latnah's new-found Abyssinian-identity is at once the key for understanding the diasporic logic of the text and a red herring. It is unclear whether Latnah is supposed to be Abyssinian in *Black Mamba Boy*'s diegetic world, or whether Jama is merely interpolating

her as such, regardless of her actual geographic or racial lineage. Jama's mode of engagement with Latnah is thus highly consistent with that of *Banjo's* black male characters who similarly impose their own readings of her ethnicity onto her body and features.

Even though Mohamed states that *Banjo* is her novel "written seventy years ago" (Metzke 72), Jama's itinerary from Aden to Hargeissa, from Hargeissa to British Ethiopia and Abyssinia, and from Egypt to Britain, approximates what Latnah's migration story might have been had we had access to it in *Banjo*. The geography of his movement is certainly closer to hers than to those of the black male vagrants in the ur-text. Through Jama's tale we obliquely get Latnah's. Mohamed's description of Aden as a global hub in which "market boys of all different hues, creeds, and languages gathered at the beach to play, bathe, and fight," and where Africans, Arabs, Jews, and Indians live alongside one another provides a context for Latnah's cosmopolitanism (7). The diversity of Aden's population, and the constant stream of people traveling to and fro this British imperial hub, also explains why Latnah cannot make any assumptions about the race of her father.

Through Mohamed's account of Bethlehem, Jama's Abyssinian wife, we are able to piece together the background of Latnah's putatively Abyssinian mother. Described as "a mule," Bethlehem is the child of a Muslim Tigre father and a Kunama Christian mother "born in a cowshed, a shepherdess in the morning, a farmer in the afternoon, and a shopgirl in the evening" (107). As *Black Mamba Boy*'s chief character of mixed ethnicity, she is the logical counterpart to Latnah; this is likely why Mohamed recasts Latnah as Abyssinian and renders her as the most legible of the black identities Jama encounters upon entering Marseilles.

The fact that Mohamed's revisionist telling of Latnah's story is so obliquely rendered—not from her own perspective but through the stories of three different characters: Jama, the Somali migrant who, like her, travels from Aden to Marseilles; his mother, who brought him to Aden from Hargeis; and Bethlehem, his Habeshi wife—indicates that storying Latnah is as much of a challenge for the revisionist novelist as it was for McKay in 1929. While the two novelists approach the task of representing overlapping diasporic practices from different angles—McKay forecloses narrative development and Mohamed layers three different plots and fates—they both figure Latnah as centrifugal character from the narrative frameworks of the texts that contain her.

Given that Latnah's tenuous membership in *Banjo*'s black male vagabond collective is premised on her illegibility as a black woman, Mohamed's rewriting of Latnah as Abyssinian and stably ensconced in the group goes against the grain of the ur-text's homosocial vision

of diaspora. Rather than being the remedy to her previous exclusion from *Banjo*'s black vagabond international, Latnah's re-configuration as "Abyssinian" highlights the geographic and epistemic fault lines of the communal identity into which she is being conscripted. In both texts, Latnah is figured as a conjunction between Arab, Asian, and sub-Saharan African communities, but to different effects. As I noted earlier, in *Black Mamba-Boy*, Latnah is conjured to rehabilitate a putatively unstoried Afro-Oriental female subject. In *Banjo,* she does not rehabilitate histories as much as she confounds categories. The effect of Latnah's introduction into the group of black male vagabonds is to elicit readerly doubt in the coherence of the latter's racial categories. In the following section, I thus show how McKay reterritorializes his characters' maps of Arabness and blackness by aggregating their inconsistent and idiosyncratic definitions of these racial categories.

Naming Race

Banjo and Latnah's opposing conceptions of the practice and meanings of racial solidarity are expressed through their different relationships to racial terms and racial identities. Banjo's practice of diaspora is based on identification and naming practices, whereas Latnah's is relational. This explains why it is difficult to fix Latnah's identity at any point in the novel—she does not really have one, instead, she has a set of affiliations. Thus when Ray asks Latnah to recount her family history, she only obliquely addresses Ray's question. Instead of a first-person response, she offers information about her mother. Moreover, her use of the past tense—"My mother *was* Negresse" distances her temporally from her mother, suggesting a break rather than a continuity between the mother's and daughter's identities (McKay 283, emphasis mine). Ironically, the only time Latnah uses the first person to articulate any kind of identity is to express doubt. In the six sentences about her family history she uses the phrase, "I don't know," three times, punctuating her account with moments of doubt. Her refrain—"I don't know"—frustrates any attempt to piece together a narrative of her origins, leaving the reader none the wiser than they were at the beginning of the novel.

All that we know about Latnah is that neither she nor we can tell the story of her family. She does not know whether her mother was Sudanese or Abyssinian, nor does she have any information about her father's side of the family. "My father I no know what he was nor who he was," she tells Ray, adding that she only knows that she was born in Aden. Even this geographical clue is inconclusive about any clear ge-

nealogical narrative as Aden was a major imperial, Indian Ocean, and Middle Eastern port that connected African and Asian communities for centuries.[5] In his reading of this scene, Jacob Berman argues that for Latnah "genealogy leads to a dead end" both because she has insufficient information and because she is not phenotypically associated with the only ancestry to which she can lay a claim (176). As he aptly puts it, "she is Arab because she speaks Arabic, yet she knows not if she actually has Arab blood in her— only that she has black blood" (176).

Latnah's sparse racial vocabulary is contrasted by her friend's comprehensive one. When the novel's limited narrator assumes the protagonists' point of view, he also takes on their taxonomizing compulsion. Take for instance, his following description of "the Cairo":

> Although the Cairo was a colored bar, the Negroes hardly ever went there. Negroes and Arabs are not fond of one another- even when they speak the same language and have the same religion. There is a great gulf, of biological profundity, between the ochre-skinned North Africans and the black dwellers below the desert. The Negro's sensual dream of life is poles apart from the Arab's hard realism. (McKay 166-67)

In his short account of the bar, the narrator names five overlapping racial communities—"colored," "Negroes," "Arabs," "North Africans," and "blacks." The first racial term, "colored" is the superordinate term that can stand in for all of them, yet he chooses to include four more so that he may differentiate one type of "colored" identity from another. Of course, the efficaciousness of these taxonomies is belied by the narrator's need for five different terms to disaggregate two communities. To make things more confusing, these terms are not used consistently across the novel; in this passage, the Cairo's clientele is "colored" but not "Negro," but in other parts of the text "colored" and "Negro" are synonymous. Even within the diegesis of the novel, the fine distinctions between Africa's sub-Saharan "black dwellers" or "Negroes" and the "ochre-skinned" North Africans that the narrator insists upon break down as soon as we consider the various mixed, light-skinned New World Blacks like Goosey that populate its text.

The referential instability of the novel's racial terms grows exponentially when we consider the various different idiolects and national contexts of its protagonist. Consider, for example, one of the novel's most common racial descriptors: "colored." This term is at once the umbrella-term for all racialized peoples: Asians, Arabs, and blacks, and in its US-American usage, a synonym for "black," "Negro," and "Afro-American." In the West Indies and South Africa it also a term that spe-

cifically refers to mixed-race peoples. *Banjo* features all of these uses of the term, adding to the novel's general semantic confusion about the perimeters of blackness.[6] This proliferation and inconsistent use of racial signifiers in the novel is, to an extent, a problem of translation.

Whereas Brent Hayes Edwards has studied the problem of translating *Banjo*'s locally specific racial terms from English to French, I wish to suggest that the original English text illuminates the difficulties of translating racial terms *within* English-speaking communities. The polysemy of "colored" in the novel results first from the nuanced meanings that this term accrues across different spaces in the British Empire and the US, and second from the acts of intra-linguistic translation between characters hailing from different parts of the Anglophone world.

Despite its Francophone setting, the English-speaking world frames the novel's lexicons of race and difference. Even when they mean different things by "colored," "Oriental," and "Negro," the characters in the novel share a common set of racial terms because they all speak the same language and participate in some form of a Global Anglophone culture. In fact, access to English determines entry into the inner circle of vagabonds. When Malty approaches a newly arrived sailor from Zanzibar, he explains to him the benefits of having friends who "speak the same as you speak and not them as you kain't trust who mix up the speech with a mess of Arabese" (22). The latter, he contends, are "a sort of bastard Arabs, them Maltese, and none of us likes them, much less trusts them" (23). Speaking Arabic, or some version of it, is an automatic sign of the Maltese ineligibility in this English-speaker-centered understanding of black communities.

It is no surprise then that the majority of *Banjo*'s characters hail from the United States or the British Empire. Malty is West Indian; Bugsy, Goosey, and Banjo African American; and Taloufa is Nigerian. The exceptions to this are the Senegalese Dengel, the Haitian-born Ray, and Latnah, the ambiguously-raced polyglot prostitute, but even they are all fluent English-speakers: Ray was educated in the US and writes in English, Dengel is "a Senegalese who spoke a little English and preferred the company of Malty and his pals to that of his countrymen," and Latnah "knows all landwidges" (8, 10).

In *From Harlem to Paris* Michel Faber argues that in *Banjo* French operates as "a barrier, or an open sesame," both on the intra-diagetic level, between characters in the novel, and on the extra-diagetic level, between the Anglophone reader and a text peppered with untranslated French words and phrases (10). According to Faber, "language and culture appear as important as color or nationality in creating cleavages in group consciousness" (ibid). This argument can also be made about the role of the English language and Anglophone cultural norms

and conception in the novel's diegesis. Banjo and his crew may dally with the French-speaking, Arab Black girls in the Ditch, and frequent African bars with a linguistically heterogenous clientele, but their most frequent and meaningful encounters are with their Anglophone group. Within this group the English language is more than a necessary cohesive. For the college-educated Ray, conversations with this eclectic group of Black English-speakers are ever-replenishing "reservoirs of niggerism" from which he "loved to pick up and feel and taste new words" (320). As white people begin to catch on to the meaning of existing code terms, the black community produces new ones. Relishing their linguistic creativity, Ray expounds on "the black boys' unconscious artistic capacity for eliminating the rotten-dead stock words of the proletariat and replacing them with startling new ones," admitting that "he gained from them finer nuances of the necromancy of language and the wisdom that any words may be right and magical in its proper setting" (321). Ray's conclusion that the subject position of the speaker and the context of the utterance significantly inflect the meanings of his words extends to acts of racial naming in the novel. Although the protagonists themselves do not reflect on the semantic slippages produced by their inconsistent application of the racial categories they have brought from their previous context to these new ones, the recurrence of these slippages destabilize the one-to-one relationships between names and referents.

The repetition of race characteristics in the novel was noted in a July 1929 review of *Banjo* published in *Times Literary Supplement*. The reviewer complains that "there is so little attempt to impose a narrative unity in them that the mere repetition of negro characteristics is apt to make for monotony," finding value only in the novel's "racy Negro idiom," which he had grown to expect, based on McKay's previous novel, *Home to Harlem* (Chalk 360). By reducing the heterogeneity of racial terms as well as subgroups indexed by them to "negro characteristics" and "Negro idiom," the reviewer misses the novel's engagement with the provisional vocabularies of race and belonging. *Banjo*'s repetition with *a difference* of its key racial signifiers: "colored," "Oriental," "African" can be read as Deleuzeian deterritorialization of those very terms—a repetition which rehearses a convention or form "in order to transform it from within, deterritorialize it" (*Thousand Plateaus* 349).

While individual acts of racial naming do a violence to the interpolated subject, aggregated, they lose their norming power. This repetition with a difference thus denaturalizes the relationship between the signifier and signified and exposes every act of racial hailing in the novel as provisional. For example, the fiction of Latnah's Orientalness is made visible through the hyper-production of racial appellations:

Arab, Indian, Persian, and Oriental. If she can be all of these things at once, she is none of them. Similarly, the narrator's compulsion to introduce more and more racial terms in a passage that references only two communities belies his struggle to effectively pin-point and name these distinctions. The novel thus simultaneously addresses the limiting function of racial terms as fixing devices and shows how acts of misnaming and misrecognition reconstitute subjects.

One of the most striking instances of misnaming occurs during Banjo's physical altercation with a racist white South African, who, in a fit of rage, calls Banjo "a bloody kaffir," only to quickly "correct himself" and call him a "nigger" instead (163). By recalibrating his insult from his South African register to one more immediately legible to an African American, the South African man implicitly acknowledges the provincial nature of racial terms. Furthermore, by deeming one local racial insult more suitable than the other, he also acknowledges that "a nigger" and a "kaffir" are not commensurable. What is being repeated here is not a particular racial identity but a relation of difference. In fact, the South African local insult is itself a repetition with a difference of another term of exclusion—the transnational Muslim community's use of the "kaffir" as a pejorative term for non-Muslims. Retooled as a racial insult by a white, presumably non-Muslim South African, and aimed at an African American residing in a black and Muslim part of Marseilles, this term becomes a parody of itself.

Here, by way of conclusion, I wish to reflect on the distinction between McKay's ludic deterritorialization of racial terms through repetition and difference, and the reproduction of racial and religious difference that is congealed in terms like "kaffir" or the legal category "national doubtful." The function of the ludic here is to make visible and to militate against this violent reproduction of difference. The repetition of terms across non-identical contexts in the service of naming non-identical subjects suggests, first, that these signifiers are interchangeable, and second, that the signifieds—the racialized subjects of the Ditch—are too. Taloufa says as much when he remarks that the nationality doubtfuls from the African and Asian diasporas are "all mixed together" there. At the same time, their doubtful status is in itself an effect of the reproduction of previous moments of conquest, colonization, and exclusion. *Banjo* thus reveals how racialized doubtfulness is repeated and reproduced across time and space.

According to Denise Freire da Silva, the only way to get a sense of the non-linear global production of racial difference is to abandon linear forms of thinking which have proved inadequate in analyses of the racial and to adopt "fractal thinking" in its stead. She explains how:

> Only complex, non-linear thinking can trace how (a) the colonial (juridico-economic) matrix that sustained merchant capital (b) operates through the racial (political-symbolic) arsenal which still supports industrial capital as well as (c) financial capital through racial violence. This tracing produces an ethico-juridical assemblage that includes the wars of global capital forcing millions out of their homes to cross the dangerous waters of the Mediterranean Sea and the Pacific Ocean. ("Fractal Thinking")

If "nationality doubtful" is the term and legal category that most visibly reveals racial formation, exclusion, and violence as fractal, Latnah is the character who conjoins these moments and spaces most vividly. Redoubled, she simultaneously appears as Latnah, the woman the vagabonds met in 1920s Marseilles, and as a half-remembered figure of alterity from some earlier moment and from a different location in the African diaspora. At the beginning of the novel, Malty sees in her an Indian schoolmate from his childhood in the Caribbean, while in the closing chapters, Ray finds resonances between her inconclusive family genealogy and his own family lore about East African ancestors with "Armenian" features. Latnah thus operates as a conjunction between different *moments* as well as different spaces of racialization.

As the specter of Malty's "almost forgotten schoolmate . . . on the cosmopolitan shore of Marseilles" and someone who seems "familiar" to Ray, Latnah conjures up simultaneously the histories of indenture and slavery in the West Indies, and the histories of migration and slavery in the Horn of Africa, where she was born (282). Even in her cameo in *Black Mamba Boy*, she simultaneously inhabits the diegetic time of *Banjo*'s novel and that of Jama's, set twenty years later. Just as a fractal shows a repeating pattern across its different scales, Latnah's presence in the novel indexes repeating patterns of Afro-Asian adjacencies engendered by capitalism's global extraction and mobilization of racialized labor. However, the black vagabond collective's production of Latnah's Oriental identity enacts a repeated *disavowal* of these adjacencies.

Of course, their disavowal is itself a repetition. In the same passage in which Malty collapses Latnah and his childhood friend, he comments on the black community's perpetual surprise with their coolie neighbors. "The novelty of their strangeness never palled on the village," he remarks (30). Latnah's strangeness is thus a repetition of a previously repeated strangeness. Here lies McKay's intervention in the storying of diaspora. The protagonists' unstable accounts of Latnah's strangeness, rendered immediately unreliable thanks to their seman-

tic slippages and inconsistencies, provide glimpses of this process of disavowal. They show that diasporic decalage is not just the "failure to translate the basic concepts of blackness" but also the failure to translate a hybrid difference, a cross-racial adjacency—a Latnah—across time and space (*Practice of Diaspora* 14).

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Notes

1. In his seminal 1980 essay "Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance" Stuart Hall charts out the limits of the two divergent conceptual models which reduce the study of race to either sociological or economical factors, without ever considering the articulation between these factors. According to Hall, "the object of inquiry [of race formation] must be treated as a complex articulated theoretical problem of an articulation between different modes of production, structured in dominance" (303).

2. This is the argument of *Black Empire*'s second chapter, entitled "The Women of Color and the Literature of a New Black World" (56-74).

3. For an in-depth discussion of inter-racial themes and plots in the US see Hazel Carb, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist, Oxford University Press*, 1987, and Frances Foster's Introduction to Frances E.W. Harper's *Iola LeRoy* (1987); Barbara Christian's "Images of Black Women in Afro-American Literature: From Stereotype to Character." (1975), and Werner Sollors, *Neither Black nor White Yet Both: Thematic Exploration of Interracial Literature* (1997).

4. Of course, since 1995 there has been much work in the direction of Lewis' model of overlapping diaspora. See Bald, Vivek. "Overlapping Diasporas, Multiracial Lives: South Asian Muslims in US Communities of Color, 1880–1950." *Souls* vol. 8, no. 4, 2006, pp. 3-18; Lubin, Alex. *Geographies of Liberation: The Making of an Afro-Arab Political Imaginary*. UNC Press Books, 2014.; Patterson, Tiffany Ruby, and Robin DG Kelley. "Unfinished migrations: reflections on the African diaspora and the making of the modern world." *African Studies Review* vol. 43, no. 1, 2000, pp. 11-45

5. For an account of Britain's imperial presence in Aden, see Spencer Mawby's *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates 1955-67: Last Outpost of a Middle East Empire*. New York: Routledge, 2007.

6. The African American character Goosey effuses about "a new day for the colored race," while the narrator mentions a mixed-race "colored' South-African on board of Banjo's ship.

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About the Author

Marina Bilbija is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Center for the Humanities at Tufts. Her research focuses on African American and Afro-diasporic literature and print culture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She also writes about the place of African American literary production in the emergent field of the Global Anglophone. She is currently working on a book manuscript entitled *Worlds of Color: Black Print Networks and the Making of the Anglophone World.*

Racial Identification, Diaspora Subjectivity, and Black Consciousness in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and Helen Oyeyemi's *Boy, Snow, Bird.*

Beauty Bragg

The 2012 publication of *New Perspectives on The Black Atlantic* solidifies critical perspectives on Paul Gilroy's groundbreaking articulation of a distinctive diaspora culture in *The Black Atlantic* (1993). Although Gilroy's work had significant impact on the study of the diaspora—most notably in its recognition of European thought and culture as an inextricable thread of diaspora culture—as with any new theory there are limits to the model he offers. In *New Perspectives*, various authors explore the impact of Gilroy's theory on the scholarship on the Atlantic world. Laura Chrisman's essay, "Whose Black World is this Anyway?" offers a trenchant critique of the way Gilroy's notions of the Atlantic have shaped the scholarship on transnationalism and diaspora. One limit she identifies is the tendency to exclude African contributions to black radical thought and movements (32).

The significance of the critique of Gilroy's localism rests in the fact that, historically, diaspora identity has been understood as a transnational phenomenon. The African Diaspora exhibits a distinct set of dynamics, which, as Elliott P. Skinner argues in "The Dialectic Between Diasporas and Homelands," differs from other diasporic experiences because of its more variable philosophical conceptions of the relation to homeland. Although the term diaspora had not yet come into vogue in the early twentieth century, Pan Africanist thinkers of that era were among the first to articulate the concept of a shared experience and shared goals for African-descended people in the U.S., the Caribbean, and Africa. W.E.B. Du Bois, one of the examples of early diasporic thinking cited by Skinner, was focused on developing a global (or transnational, if you will) architecture that would enable economic access and political enfranchisement for those who had been excluded by slavery and colonialism. To forge such a transnational architecture required the development of a race-based politics of identity that could

potentially transcend differences of culture, geo-political positioning, and language. The concept of diaspora identity developed by Pan Africanist thinkers continued to influence black intellectual enterprise throughout the twentieth century—from the Négritude Movement to Afrocentrism, the concept of a universal black origin and experience continued to be a core concept in diasporic thinking.

By contrast, in the effort to specify some unique forms of cultural identity and political agency that develop in the Americas, Gilroy's concept of the Black Atlantic minimally engaged African continental politics and cultural production. According to Chrisman, this narrowed focus is, in the present, reproduced by "the institutionalization of black Atlantic and black transnational studies with the US" (37). Echoing Chrisman's critique, Wumi Raji argues "a call for black solidarity across the Atlantic . . . ought to be premised on a sensitive appreciation of the history of the people" (193). Since that history begins with the African continent, any attempt to understand fully "an intercultural, transnational and hybridized perspective of identity" must establish a dialogue between the various constituents of the diaspora (176). In response to such calls for conscious attention to the African perspectives and experiences in relation to the formation of resistant, diasporic consciousness, this essay considers literary elaborations of diaspora consciousness in two recent novels—Chimanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) and Helen Oyeyemi's *Boy, Snow, Bird* (2014). These authors embody social and professional experiences that engender a unique set of questions for the meaning of diaspora. These questions include: "What is the African Novel?", "What constitutes diasporic subjectivity?", and "What is black identity?"

Recent scholarship on African literature has begun to address the question of the African novel in new ways, reflecting the salience of the first question. While the issues of language and audience have always been factors complicating the definition of African literatures, questions of geography have risen to the fore. Where, previously, African literature was tied to the African continent, the reality of a late twentieth-century wave of immigration has produced a new set of African identities as well as a new way of thinking about African literature. Some have identified the category of Third Generation writing for such literature, and have attempted to articulate a continuous relationship with previous literary traditions in Africa. Such works have inaugurated a new phase of literary concerns that are distinguished from first and second generation concerns. Where early modern African literature was concerned with articulating an identifiable African culture, and the second, post-colonial generation was consumed by a critique of the failures of independence, this third generation evinces a marked

interest in interrogating the product of these two historical phases. Nigeria has been particularly generative of these Third Generation authors and perspectives, producing numerous figures of note including Teju Cole, Chris Abani, Helen Oyeyemi, and Chimamanda Adichie. For some, though, the fact they were either born outside of the continent or currently live and work in the U.S. primarily, has raised questions as to whether or not these authors should be considered African or not (Tunca 106). To answer this question, some have proposed the designation "diaspora writers."

While this term may not specify the particular experiences of the transnational African subject, there is a certain precision to its use because what many of the writers investigate are subjective relationships to concepts such as home, nation, black identity—defining characteristics of diaspora literature. The emergence of a new body of African literature produced by authors who are situated in multiple geographic and cultural contexts has necessitated critical and theoretical reorientation among scholars. Thus, in a marked shift away from *The Black Atlantic*'s legacy of attending to the distinctive experiences of local communities within the diaspora, twenty-first century scholarship has reanimated a concern with the processes of shared consciousness in the African diaspora.

In his 2009 essay, "Diaspora Dialogues: Engagements between Africa and Its Diasporas," Paul Tiyambe Zeleza makes some significant contributions to the reframing of the discourse on the African Diaspora. His discussion does not deny the differences among various groups' experiences, to which the more localistic approach was meant to attend. He is concerned, however, with showing that those differences are not separate from, but a part of how "African diasporas . . . relate not only to their hostlands and homelands but also to each other" (31). Zeleza's concern with this dialectical relationship returns us to what was, before *The Black Atlantic*, a pronounced understanding of the process of diaspora as defined by a center periphery model.[1]

In making his argument, Zeleza draws a pointed distinction between immigration and diasporization, which are not necessarily simultaneous processes (41). I focus on this dialectic in my discussion of Adichie's *Americanah*, outlining the significant work it does to highlight the cultural and political relationships between contemporary Nigeria and the United States, and the particular role that media and technology play in mediating these relationships. My discussion of *Boy, Snow, Bird* foregrounds the notion of diaspora subjectivity not just as a mode of mediating between "here" and "there" but as a product of interrelations between multiple diaspora communities. Together, the

two novels I discuss in this essay offer opportunities to explore group consciousness as an additional defining factor of diasporic identity.

In approaching the question of how an immigrant becomes a member of the diaspora, I draw on and extend Zeleza's observation that prolonged and permanent resettlements are preconditions for transitioning from immigrant to diasporan subject. I argue that in addition to temporality and spatiality, another significant aspect of the transition takes place at the vector of mentality. Central to this consciousness is the question of racial identification and subjectivity, which are not necessarily captured in simple questions of time and place. Helen Oyeyemi's *Boy, Snow, Bird* is a useful site of examination because it represents a conscious mode of diasporan identification with black identity. Oyeyemi, a British citizen of Nigerian descent, perfectly embodies the result of the process of diaporization Zeleza describes. This process is, he says: "One beginning with migration, followed by resettlement, and reproduced through the offspring of the migrants" (41). As accurate as this description may be, it does not explain the processes of racial identification that create a distinction that goes beyond the processes of acculturation associated with any immigrant community. Chimamanda Adichie's novel *Americanah* likewise moves the reader toward an awareness of the processes of racial identification that are central to diaspora consciousness, but challenges Zeleza's model by interrupting the usual temporal and spatial dimensions of diasporic experience by having its protagonist return to Nigeria. Still, I argue, she can be considered diasporan because she retains the black consciousness she develops during her American sojourn and it can even be seen to have enabled her return.

In addition to Oyeyemi's personal background, which illustrates some of the complexities of diaspora subjectivity, *Boy, Snow, Bird* enacts an implicit dialogism through its formal characteristics. In this novel, Oyeyemi fuses the mythology of Europe and the social experience of African Americans in an intriguing revision of the Snow White narrative. Although no actual African nation state is referenced in the novel, Oyeyemi's own ambiguous relationship to Nigeria can be seen as a prime mediating factor in this narrative. She has noted in interviews that she is primarily interested in exploring genres. "With *The Icarus Girl*, I wanted to write a doppelganger story. *White is for Witching* was my haunted-house/vampire story," she states (Hoggard). Still, careful attention to the physical trajectory of her novels, moving from settings in England, to Cuba, to the United States, suggests an engagement with the same routes traveled by enslaved Africans. Moreover, critic Brenda Cooper has read Oyeyemi's novel *The Opposite House* as reflecting an attempt "to come to terms with her ambivalence about 'her country'"

(109). Oyeyemi noted, in 2005, certain tensions resulting from being an immigrant to a nation where "60% of the population would still 'prefer not' to live next door to a member of an ethnic minority," while belonging to a generation that feels they "will never be purely African enough for our parents;" leaving them "running around looking to see reflections of [their] selves." Consequently, I understand her engagement with a European narrative tradition and its idealization of whiteness to be related to the marginal position she occupies as a black woman in Britain. However, her engagement with diaspora identity provides an alternative, enabling position of identification that is reflected in *Boy, Snow, Bird* and its politics of diaspora solidarity.

Here I want to offer a brief plot summary in order to make clear the basis of what I see as Oyeyemi's dialogic engagement with homeland and hostland. The novel as I mentioned is a retelling of the Snow White story complete with a figure who represents the King, a wicked stepmother, and a banished Snow. Beginning in the middle twentieth century, the narrative focuses on events in the life of Boy Novak, who will come to occupy the role of the stepmother when she marries a man, Arturo Whitman, who is an esteemed member of the New England community of Flax Hill to which she fled as a young woman. Boy has been abused by the man she believes to be her father.[2]

Although Boy gets off to a faltering start in Flax Hill, she does come to find friends, employment, and some version of romance when she marries the widower Arturo. Initially, the two are thrown together by circumstance with each of them serving as companions to their friends on double-dates. Since Arturo is widowed and the father of a young daughter, Snow, he is more interested than she in pursuing a relationship, but eventually they do marry and she becomes pregnant and gives birth to their biological daughter, Bird. Bird's birth is the occasion for the revelation that Arturo Whitman is, in fact, legally defined as black but has lived the life of a white man because his parents had chosen to leave Louisiana to pass in Flax Hill. In a significant reversal of colorist ideology, the result of this revelation is to banish Snow, the child whose birth did not reveal their secret and upon whose beauty everyone has doted. Bird, born with a suntan and features that caused the nurse to exclaim "that little girl is a Negro" is allowed to remain with her parents and grow to be a quite precocious and charming child (136). Ultimately, Bird will become a significant factor in the tentative reconciliations with which the novel ends. However, for now my interest is in discussing the significance of Oyeyemi's complicated rendering of constructs of race and beauty and her adoption of the passing trope as the means of engaging them.

By using Boy, a white woman whose femininity has made her a target of physical violence, as the central consciousness, the first section of the novel chronicles social reverence for particular forms of white femininity. Her direct experience of the intersection of gender and power at the location of her physical body heightens her perspective and establishes a general framework in which whiteness and beauty begin to be interrogated as mechanisms of female social control. This interrogation is most prominent in her budding friendship with Mia, a journalist whom she meets while working as a hostess for a Valentine's Day party catering to local business men. The ad to which she has responded for the job asked for "blondes (lots of blonds most shapes, shades, and sizes...)" and Mia is there to complete "a catty article about blondes written by a brunette" (27, 50). Mia desires to write something more profound which captures the idea that all women are tyrannized by the beauty aesthetic and the marriage market which it serves (this portion of the novel is set in the 1950s, so marriage is still a significant expectation and achievement for a majority of women), but has difficulty doing so. Boy helps her by pointing her toward a fairy tale with which they are both familiar. The tale recounts the defeat of a magician who was known for either bestowing or vanquishing beauty in the women "brought to him by their ambitious mothers or diffident fathers" (54). In and of itself, this narrative of external bequest or denial challenges the notion of inherent beauty since his words determine the perception. As the tale unfolds, it also functions to reveal the way that the construction of beauty is an act of power when a farmer approaches the magician to request that he take away the beauty of his recalcitrant wife. The magician can neither make the wife obey nor diminish or enhance her beauty because she has determined her own value and refuses to be the object of the male gaze. She tells him:

> "All I've ever wanted is to make things grow, and to feed people. I've been doing that for some years now, and I've been happy. I don't want anything more or less than what I already have. I beg you: Don't disturb my life."
> "But your husband is frightened of you," the magician told her.
> "I've given him no cause to be," she replied.
> "And yet he can hardly bear to look at you..."
> "It isn't necessary for him to look at me." (57)

Although no racial attributes are assigned to the farmer, the magician, or the wife, several details of the story and the language used in its telling suggest links to both Africans and African Americans. The magician assumes that the wife is a witch and finds her a distinctive one

because he has never known a witch to practice "this particular kind of passive resistance" (56). Oyeyemi's choice to frame the wife's refusal in language associated with the Civil Rights movement and the addition of the detail that the wife is growing cassava signal a specific cultural and historical context and, consequently, work to expand the parameters of the gendered critique to include women of African descent.

By expanding the parameter of gender constructions, the novel lays the groundwork for its examination of the intersection of race, nation, and personal identity, accomplished through its use of the African American literary trope of passing. The confluence of these categories is made explicit through Boy's relationship to her stepdaughter, Snow, and the birth of her biological daughter, Bird, who exposes the Whitmans' passing. The relationship between the two daughters forms a dialectic of visibility and invisibility that is specifically contextualized in relation to the Civil Rights movement. Prior to Bird's birth, Snow is universally doted upon because of her looks—"A medieval swan maiden, only with the darkest hair and the pinkest lips"—and pliability (81). After Bird's birth, it becomes apparent that her grandmother Olivia's doting, in particular, contains an extra dimension. Snow's looks are revered not only because they epitomize Eurocentric beauty ideals but also because, in so doing, they assure the secret of her family's passing. By contrast, Olivia's reaction to the "beautiful, too" infant Bird is to turn away from "her close curls and her bottomless eyes" (139). Olivia's rejection of blackness is revealed to be primarily ideological since after Bird's birth the family's social lives in Flax Hill continue on the same as before. In her use of this passing trope, Oyeyemi foregrounds the ideological components of racial identification and reveals the possibility of a conscious rejection of whiteness and positive identification with blackness. Surprisingly, this resistant dynamic is initiated by Boy, a white woman.

While Olivia cannot tolerate Bird, Boy cannot tolerate Snow, and arranges to have her go and live with the estranged, visibly black sister-in-law, Clara. This act functions to reanimate the symbol of the Civil Rights movement, only alluded to earlier in the novel, as Aunt Clara and her husband John are leaders of their hometown movement. Their politicized notions of black identity provide a context for examining black agency and processes of self-identification. Recounting her experiences with her aunt and uncle in the town of Twelve Bridges in a series of letters to Bird, Snow evinces a strong identification with its communal sensibility, stating: "We're friendly with strangers because of a general belief . . . that we're born strangers and that the memory of how that feels never really leaves us" (226). In addition to the use of the collective pronoun, which situates Snow firmly within the Twelve

Bridges community despite her white appearance, this statement reflects a strong belief in the possibility of connection across difference by suggesting a shared experience and shared memory. This notion of conscious identification is developed even more fully throughout the series of letters exchanged between the sisters.

This exchange, initiated by the thirteen-year-old Bird, is the sole means of their interactions as neither has been allowed to visit the other and Boy has been actively inhibiting their communication by hiding Snow's letters to the family. They discover early on that they share an important physical trait; they "don't always show up in mirrors" (212). This mutual confession, however, proves too fraught with danger to serve as an adequate basis of connection between the two. Bird dismisses Snow's claim to invisibility as a condescending attempt to humor her and Snow warns Bird that making such a claim could lead to a diagnosis of mental illness. Their inability to communicate successfully on this subject indicates the limits of shared identification built on the experience of absence and loss. Oyeyemi offers instead the exchange of narratives of diasporic folklore as the basis of their shared connection. In response to Snow's description of a homeschool experience that included "learning *Brer Anansi* stories to begin with," Bird responds by describing her familiarity with Anansi stories as well as a conversational exchange with actual spiders that revealed the stories as "very dear" to them (219, 228). Indeed, the stories are so dear that spiders are upset that they have been shared with outsiders. In order to ameliorate their alarm, Bird offers a different, new world story focusing on human characters: the story of La Belle Capuchin. Strikingly, upon receiving this response Snow is open to the possibility that somehow Bird can talk to spiders, asking only "how do I do it?" before sharing her own story of La Belle Capuchine.

The story of La Belle Capuchine, as presented in the novel, is either the story of an enslaved mulatta who buys into the ideology of white superiority, imitating the racist values of the slave-owning class, or of the intersection of beauty and power in a female figure who recklessly asserts her will "by making her poison garden bigger and bigger until it's the only thing in the world" (237). In the former version, told by Bird, it is La Belle Capuchine who ultimately suffers from her attitudes, which open the way for her to be mistaken for part of the slave-owning family when, finally, High John the Conqueror returns and liberates the enslaved. La Belle, abandoned, finds that her "beauty" has no value in the end. Similarly, Snow's story of La Belle emphasizes the notion of alienation, but it functions more as a symbol of her own sense of alienation because of having been banished, than as resistance to a particular racial ideology. Still, the exchange of the stories signals the build-

ing of a shared consciousness between the two sisters as both versions of the story also push back against the Whitman family narrative of "pulling off confidence tricks and getting in with the right people and lording it over other colored folks and getting the last laugh" (220-221).

By drawing on and creating African American folklore as a basis of shared consciousness, Oyeyemi directs our attention to the multiple exchanges that shape the Atlantic world. Moreover, this strategy emphasizes the process of developing an intersectional, global black subjectivity. Combined with her use of the passing trope—a distinctive element of the African American literary tradition—it signals a specific strategy of interrogation of the processes of identity. From its inception in the nineteenth century, the racial passing novel has, as Kathleen Pfeiffer claims, presented a theme that "challenges more than the racial construction of one's own identity: it also highlights the vexed interchange between one's race, one's nation, and one's self" (19). These interchanges are expressed in passing's engagements of the corporeal body in relation to national bodies as they are socially and ideologically constructed. Thus, the passing frame provides for Oyeyemi a mechanism that situates her characters' negotiations within a broad social context that mirrors the experiences of the neo-diasporic subject, whose identity is similarly vexed. This strategy of simultaneous engagement with Europe through the fairy tale and African America through the passing novel constitutes a rejection of the position of other in relation to both homeland and hostland. By creating an alliance with African American literary tradition, Oyeyemi resists her potentially marginal position in relation to both British and African literatures and embraces a space of diaspora consciousness.

In *Americanah*, the engagement of geographic sites and their relation to black subjectivity is much more directly addressed. In fact, the very structure of the novel prioritizes concepts of mobility with its constant shifts in temporal and spatial location, which highlight and enable the complexity of negotiating transnational identifications. In general, I understand this theme of mobility as a reflection of the novel's concern with contemporary Nigerian identity. In this way, Adichie reflects the trend in Nigerian literature as a whole to articulate identity by centralizing travel and mobility, resulting in "new metropolitan tropes" (Nwakanama 1). Hers is one of the new African novels, concerned with exploring and exploiting symbols of identity in order to examine the gaps between myths of nation and lived experience. This concern contextualizes the novel's turn to the United States as a major setting that resituates African identity in a global context. This interrogation of contemporary identity is born out even in the title of the novel, *Americanah*, which refers to a particular mode of Nigerian iden-

tity. Typically, the word "Americana" is used to signify artifacts that represent distinct aspects of American culture and identity. The addition of the "h" suggests, however, a particularly Nigerian perspective and denotes a Nigerian who bears the distinctive stamp of her experience in the United States. The implications of this term within the text are somewhat derogatory as it tends to indicate a softening of indigenous instincts or a loss of authenticity. For instance, when the protagonist announces to her family members that she intends to move back to Nigeria, they question whether she will "be able to cope" (Adichie 17). She feels that they are indicating that she was "somehow irrevocably altered by America" (17). In fact, she is impacted deeply and this is reflected in her movement through various geographic spaces, which highlights distinctive aspects of her identity, as well as through her relationships with people. These movements and relationships are not signs of loss or a failure to connect with the host nation; rather they engender a political consciousness that gives meaning to her choice to return to Nigeria in the novel's conclusion. She is choosing home with an awareness of the limits and possibilities offered in each locale.

One way to clarify this distinction between the diasporic subject's active construction of an expanded identity as distinct from the kind of one-way assimilation predicated on loss (as her parents and others imagine) is to focus on the novel's contrasting representation of the experiences of Ifemelu and her ex-boyfriend Obinze, who migrates to England. Their early experiences as immigrants are very similar in that they have difficulty finding employment, find the social norms of the people they encounter alien, and suffer a sense of alienation resulting from both of these facts. Ultimately, though, Ifemelu is able to transcend these conditions by forging first psychic and then physical connections with other black populations. These distinct experiences suggest a reading of the U.S. as a space that enables the development of a diasporic consciousness.

The novel's opening lines, "Princeton, in the summer, smelled of nothing, and although Ifemelu liked the tranquil greenness of the many trees, the clean streets and stately homes . . . it was this, the lack of a smell that most appealed to her," serve to establish the dialectic between here and there that structures the rest of the novel (3). In fact, even as the narrator is describing Ifemelu's pleasure in the neutrality of Princeton—which allows her "to be someone else, someone specially admitted into a hallowed American club"—the character is preparing to leave not just Princeton, but the United States (3). In contrast to the physical space of Princeton, which enables the trying on of identities, the digital realm and Ifemelu's occupation as a blogger, whose blog is called "Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks

(Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black," are associated with the destabilization of her identity. In fact, "the more she wrote, the less sure she became. Each post scraped off yet one more scale of self until she felt naked and false" (5). The central idea conveyed here is that the digital exploration of race is also an act of self-exploration. The images of exposure and inauthenticity convey the serious work of examining the identities projected onto her as well as those that she chooses. Bringing American Black and Non-American Black identity into dialogue helps her to understand and more fully contextualize her own experience.

In Princeton, she typifies the best-case scenario of the neo-diaspora. She is there on a fellowship and she is earning well through speaking engagements. In other words, she is realizing the opportunities that drew her and those like her to the U.S. Consequently, she typifies the immigrant aspiration and her nationality is the most prominent aspect of her identity. However, this narrative is complicated by other, less neutral spaces. Both Trenton, where she goes to get her hair braided, and cyberspace, where she attempts to work out the nuances of black identity, require much more negotiation on her part. They reveal the complexities of racialized aspects of identity that cut across national boundaries and link her experience to others based on some essential physical aspects of their blackness.

Adichie, playing with the notion of strategic essentialism, shapes the story so that it is hair that binds her to the other African immigrants she encounters in Trenton, because in Princeton, "the few black locals . . . were so light-skinned and lank-haired" that they did not constitute a sufficient market to support a hair-braiding shop (3). Such a statement draws attention to itself in its play with notions of authentic and inauthentic blackness, where "light-skinned" and "lank hair" signify a dilute form of blackness. Still, the concept of authenticity is not uncontested within the shop where Ifemelu is brought into contact with other Africans, by whom she is simultaneously repelled and comforted. The women from Mali and Senegal are depicted in the most unflattering terms possible—one is severely cross-eyed and another's neck and arms exhibit "ghastly sores" which provoke Ifemelu to imagine them "bursting and oozing, others flaking" (15). In spite of this repulsion, Ifemelu does feel within that space a sense of camaraderie across differences of class and geography. At one point, she feels her "irritation [dissolve], and in its place a gossamered sense of kinship grew because Aisha would not have asked [about her immigration status] if she were not an African" (363).

Other events that take place within the space of the braiding shop expand this pan-African consciousness to include African Americans

as well. When a white woman enters the salon to have her hair braided this act of appropriative entitlement highlights the white/black divide and filters it all through a dialogue about the book Ifemelu is reading, Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923). Although Ifemelu tries to resist conversing with her—describing *Cane*, simply, as a mixture of prose and verse—the woman insists on continuing the conversation and begins to render her opinion on contemporary African texts. She tells Ifemelu that in preparation for an upcoming trip to Congo and Kenya she has been reading *Things Fall Apart* (1958), which she dismisses as "quaint" and not as useful as *A Bend in the River* (1979) for helping her "understand modern Africa" (189). Ifemelu's response to this assertion is to tell the woman that, in her opinion, Naipaul's book is not about Africa but "about the battered image of an Indian man born in Africa, who felt so wounded, so diminished, by not having been born European . . . that he turned his personal insufficiencies into an impatient contempt for Africa" (190). This exchange, arising from the woman's sense of privileged entitlement to define the realities of black people, draws the reader's attention to the way that both traditionally defined and neo-diasporic identities are bound by their relation of difference to whiteness.

In this way, *Americanah* highlights not just relations between people but also the infrastructure of consciousness, which allows the character to move beyond the black American/non-American black divide. Specifically, it highlights media and literature as mechanisms of connection between people, an idea articulated by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who understands the literature of people of color as "one of the more enduring multinational cultural processes which have been building the basis of a shared common tradition" (13). Thus, when considering the novel's attention to developing a diasporic subjectivity, it is important to note that many of her political insights are enabled by her reading in African American literature that includes authors such as James Baldwin, Yusef Komunyakaa, along with Toomer. It is through such texts, in part, that Ifemelu begins to gain an understanding of African American historical experience that allows her to understand the processes of racialization to which she is subjected as a black person in America.

By contrast, in England, Obinze's experiences with other black people and histories is limited. Most of his interactions are with other African immigrants, primarily the Angolans who help to arrange his marriage for citizenship status and several other Nigerians, all of whom he knew from home. This limited range of interactions is highly contrasted to Ifemelu's experience in the United States. She encounters a much broader array of characters and her interactions with them reflect

the processes of black identification in a way that we do not witness in relation to Obinze. Moreover, he has a distinct experience with media representation, too. Obinze's encounters with the media are cast in a hysterical tenor that names him and other immigrants as targets. As he moves through London, he repeatedly encounters lurid tabloid headlines like "Schools Swamped by Asylum Seekers" and "Speak English at home, Blunkett tells immigrants" which work to emphasize his alienation and to lessen his surprise at the fact that he is finally caught and deported (258). His response to this alienation is to seek out the succor of popular American fiction in the kind of large-scale bookstore that includes a coffee shop and encourages patrons to read their books even if they do not purchase them. The significance of his consumption of this material is brought to the fore in a conversation that takes place among Ifemelu's American friends regarding the racial politics of publishing. They reflect on the fact that "We are very ideological about fiction in this country" and assert "You can't even read American fiction to get a sense of how actual life is lived these days" (336). Their commentary associates the category "American" with a focus on whiteness, which stands in relief from Ifemelu's reading habits, which focus on African Americans. When Obinze's consumption of American fiction is filtered through this lens, the fact that his encounters with the American psyche are mediated through this commercial context rather than a historical one indicates a diminished possibility for his developing a critical diaspora consciousness.

Because of his failure to examine his personal politics of identity, the nature of his return home is highly contrasted to Ifemelu's. It is framed in terms of the loss of possibility and results in his adopting the false identity of a Nigerian "big man" in a corrupt order that he despises. Instead of taking pleasure in his attainment of a big house, beautiful wife, and status following his deportation from England, Obinze's days are colored by ambivalence and the feeling of "a hollow space between himself and the person he was supposed to be" (27). In fact, it is not until Ifemelu's return to Nigeria that he is able to take action to construct his life according to his own values. Because she is the mechanism of his transformation, Ifemelu's return can be read as the symbol of her mature diaspora consciousness in which her affective connection to other diaspora communities actually strengthens her ties to home because they free her from either an idolatrous or disdainful view of homeland. Her return demonstrates the multi-directional nature of diaspora and links the text to the aforementioned Third Generation concern with articulating new national identities.

Ifemelu's understanding of the operation of racial ideologies is not only developed through her encounters with various forms of repre-

sentation. Her interpersonal relationships also play a significant role in shaping her perspective. Her romantic and familial relations illuminate the operation of blackness in relation to national identities, in relation to whiteness, and relative to disparate forms of blackness. Her relationship with her cousin Dike is one of these important relationships that foreground the distinctions among various neo-diaspora experiences. Unlike Ifemelu, he has been brought to the United States as a baby and is acculturated to the U.S. The fact that he lives a significant segment of his life in largely white suburban communities has heightened his sense of himself as a black person to the degree that this may even overshadow his Nigerian identity. As a teen, he adopts stereotypically African American modes of self-presentation, taking on "a swagger in his voice and in his gear . . . and sprinkl[ing] his speech with 'ain't' and 'y'all'" (332). These transformations signal his acquiescence to a simplistic white/black racial ideology, but his alignment with the dominant racial schema does little to ameliorate his sense of estrangement from Nigerian nationality. In fact, his subsequent suicide attempt indicates he suffers from his inability to integrate his (American) blackness and his Nigerianness. Ifemelu's conversation with his mother suggests the limits of such a binary approach when Aunty Uju explains that she didn't want him to adopt the victim mentality that she associated with African Americans—to which Ifemelu responds: "You told him what he wasn't but you didn't tell him what he was" (380). As a witness to his trauma, Ifemelu becomes even more aware of the necessity of interrogating symbols of nation and belonging and her comment about the need to offer a concrete identity points to the necessity of conscious and directed processes of identification. In articulating this perspective, the novel once again pushes back against a simplistic notion of diaspora identity being constituted by the mere act of immigration.

While Ifemelu's observation of her cousin helps her to understand herself in relation to home and nation, her romantic relationships are no less important to her understanding of herself in relation to blackness. Adichie offers two distinct approaches to the politics of blackness by focusing on questions of desire and racial allegiance, respectively, in the rendering of Ifemelu's relationships with her white boyfriend, Curt, and black boyfriend, Blaine. Her relationship with Curt, the wealthy white male cousin of the woman for whom she worked as nanny, is striking initially because it exposes the intersections of race and class as they operate in the United States by illuminating his wealth and privilege and her lack of them. However, the more subtle challenge presented by their relationship emerges from the fact that in spite of Curt's superior positioning along the axis of race and class, Ifemelu retains the emotional power in the relationship. This small scale reor-

dering of the dynamics of power is accomplished largely through the text's reversal of the racial gaze. The novel's focus on this discrepancy in power illustrates that black and white interactions are structured by looking relations, in which the white gaze constructs the meaning of blackness.

The conflict of interests encoded in the racial gaze is captured in Curt's eager description of their relationship as one of "love at first laugh," which simultaneously invokes and erases the notion of love at first sight (191). This multivalent approach to the idea of sight aptly captures their differing relations to power on a social scale and establishes the notion of misrecognition as a structuring principle of their relationship. Because of his status as a white man, he expects to be seen as an individual and she expects, because of her membership in a particular racial group, not to be seen at all. He interprets her failure to immediately recognize his interest in her as playing coy—"pretending not to notice because she didn't want a white man" (191). In actuality, she does not recognize his interest because she has become accustomed to being invisible to white men as objects of romantic interest. When she does realize his interest in her, she is more moved by his looking at her than she is by him as a person. She revels in the idea of "How glorious it was, to be wanted, and by this man . . . She began to like him because he liked her" (192). Additionally, we see him—his "pale hair and pale skin, the rust-colored moles on his back, the fine sprinkle of golden chest hair"—through her eyes as an object of desire (195). Still, in emotional terms her distance is maintained and she sometimes feels the desire to "strike at" or "crush" his happiness (197). Thus, although Curt possesses the power of racial privilege and wealth, Ifemelu controls the terms of their relationship, causing Curt to declare in frustration that he does not want to "be a sweetheart" he wants "to be the fucking love of [her] life" when he can no longer deny her lack of passion (224). Although he is not the love of her life, her relationship with him is an important phase in the development of her identity resulting as it does in an awareness of the body politics of racial hierarchy that are encoded in the themes of looking, physical attraction, and attractiveness that structure their relationship.

By contrast, Ifemulu's relationship with Blaine begins with them being equally desirous of each other, but is marked by Blaine's sense of his more highly developed race consciousness. The conflicts they have over what he sees as her political naiveté provide a mechanism to display Ifemelu's negotiation of her own allegiances and alliances with African Americans. Indeed, his symbolic role in her life is emphasized from the moment of his introduction in the text. Although Ifemelu had not always been able to distinguish place of origin for members

of the diaspora, regarding Blaine she "knew right away that he was African American . . . a descendant of black men and women who had been in America for hundreds of years" (176). As with her relations with the women in the braiding salon, Ifemelu's interactions with Blaine are marked by a dual perspective. She often admires his moral convictions, but also sees a kind of performance of blackness at work. These competing perspectives are aptly illustrated in the events that comprise one of their biggest fights—over her failure to show up for a protest that Blaine has organized on behalf of an African American security guard who is an employee of the same university, Yale, at which Blaine is employed as faculty. The guard is someone whom Blaine has befriended, in part, it is implied, because he represents a certain kind of racial authenticity to Blaine. Ifemelu notes that when Blaine speaks to Mr. White, "his syntax was different, his cadences more rhythmic" hinting at his performance of "Ebonics" (342). His personal notion of black authenticity is more benign, but, nonetheless, parallels the stereotypical notion of blackness that leads to Mr. White's detainment and questioning by the police after someone at his place of work (largely white Yale) witnesses him pass his keys to a friend (presumably black) who is borrowing his car and reports it as a drug transaction. Although the man himself is not too shaken by the events, Blaine insists on organizing a demonstration. When he discovers that Ifemelu lied to him about why she did not attend the protest, it exposes an underlying tension in their relationship: the fact that that they do have differing experiences and, as a result, differing perspectives. That difference is reflected in the choice about which Ifemelu lied. Instead of attending the protest, Ifemelu has attended a luncheon with a visiting African scholar. Blaine interprets her action as a betrayal; an interpretation that, from Ifemelu's point of view, contains "a subtle accusation, not merely about her lack of zeal and conviction, but also about her Africanness . . . she was not sufficiently furious because she was an African, not African American" (345). In framing her action as betrayal Blaine can avoid interrogating his own politics but he does so at the cost of negating an aspect of Ifemelu's identity that is important to her. Her friendship with the professor, Boubacar, is in fact rooted in the way that it affirms her identity as African. Far from being exclusive, though, this affirmation allows her to see herself in broader more expansive terms that highlight her identification with diaspora blackness as a choice rather than the act of assimilation it would be if she simply adopted Blaine's "African American" perspective.

Ultimately, examining these two novels is very useful for thinking about the complexities and specificities of neo-diasporic subject formations. They engage the politics of the personal and of representa-

tion to explore the challenge of building productive inter-diasporic relations that neither overemphasize nor displace the importance of the West as a site of diasporic production. They disrupt a notion of diasporic subjectivity bounded by nationalist frameworks through their dialogic engagement of literary tropes and categories, played out in relation to African identity. Further, these texts exemplify a notion of diasporic resistance that Paul Gilroy captured in his emphasis on the concept of "Routes" over "roots". The former privileges the black body in motion as a sign of the shifting relations to home, power, and culture that are captured in Oyeyemi's interweaving of multiple narrative threads and Adichie's staging of processes of personal transformation.

Notes

1. See, for example, the first section of Joseph Harris's *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora* (1982), where three of the four essays contrast the development of the African diaspora with that of the Jewish diaspora, highlighting differences regarding the question of geographic homeland and the (im)possibility of return.

2. Late in the novel it is revealed that the man Boy believes to be her father is actually her mother, who has been passing as a man since she was raped and impregnated. That the novel contains two instances of passing is provocative and consistent with Oyeyemi's tendency to use doubling in her narrative. Still, the limits of this essay do not allow me to explore this strategy at length.

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About the Author

Beauty Bragg holds a Ph.D in English from the University of Texas at Austin. She is the author of *Reading Contemporary African American Literature: Black Women's Popular Fiction, Post-Civil Rights Experience and the African American Canon*. Her teaching and research focus on various aspects of diaspora culture and literature, including African spirituality, hip hop aesthetics, and female sexuality.

Pan-Africanism, Transnationalism, and Cosmopolitanism in Langston Hughes's Involvement in the First World Festival of Black Arts

Babacar M'Baye

Many critics have interpreted Langston Hughes's relations with Africans as a hopeless search for connections with other black people who did not perceive him as similar to them. For instance, Norma Ramsay Jones describes Hughes's encounter with Africa in 1923, when he served as a twenty-one-year old mess-boy aboard a merchant ship, as "anything but inspirational," since "the Africans refused to believe that Hughes was black" (264). Jones bases her argument on a passage from the autobiography, *The Big Sea* (1940), in which Hughes writes: "It [Africa] was the only place in the world where I've ever been called a white man. They looked at my copper-brown skin and straight black hair—like my grandmother's Indian hair, except a little curly—and they said: 'You—white man'" (103). Jones's assessment overlooks how Hughes overcame his momentary dejections with Africans by identifying with them politically, socially, and economically. A less polemical interpretation of the Africans' perception of Hughes as a white man suggests that the episode might have prompted the poet to search for the origins of his complex identity in the troubled racial and colonial history that produced it. As Harold R. Isaacs points out, Hughes uses his unpleasant African incident as the pivotal moment when he

> goes back to tell the story of his life, of his family with all its mixtures of bloods and colors, of white great-grandparents, of strains of poets and statesmen and Indian chiefs, Cherokee, Jewish, Scotch, French, and Negro forebears . . . He tells of his wandering life, with his mother, with his aunt, with a stepfather, and with his father who had migrated to Mexico to make his way because there was no color line or Jim Crow there. His father hated 'niggers' and 'hated himself too, for being a Negro'; he had great contempt for all poor people and valued only money made to keep. (240)

Hughes certainly knew that the confusing American history of endemic and mutual ethnic deprecations that produced and reared him was responsible for his complex biological and social identities that the Africans misinterpreted on racial and social lines. In an attempt to prevent the reader from making the same mistake, by analyzing the meaning of race in Africa within American contexts mainly, Hughes says in *The Big Sea*: "You see, unfortunately, I am not black. There are lots of different kinds of blood in our family. But here in the United States, the word 'Negro' is used to mean anyone who has *any* Negro blood at all in his veins. In Africa, the word is more pure. It means all Negro, therefore black" (11). In this passage, Hughes somewhat overcomes the dilemma that Africans, who did not see him as black, had ushered, by using Africa as the place where he begins an inventory of the painful and complex history that shaped his identity.

Moreover, by dwelling on initial moments of Hughes's disillusionment with Africa, critics ignore the other times during which the intellectual established transnational and cosmopolitan ties with Léopold Sédar Senghor, the first President of the Republic of Senegal, during the First World Festival of Negro Arts. This convention was held in Dakar, Senegal, in April 1966, and as Tracy Snipe argues, was an event in which Hughes was one of Senghor's special guests, among 2,500 artists and 25,000 guests, including Duke Ellington and Katherine Dunham (55). The Dakar festival grew out of previous relationships among a selected group of black Anglophone and Francophone political leaders, writers, and other intellectuals who forged the alliances that were later revisited in upcoming gatherings such as the 1955 Bandung Conference, the 1956 Congress of Black Writers in Paris, and other major summits. Through his involvement in the Dakar festival and his influences on the Négritude literary movement, which Senghor co-founded in the 1940s, Hughes demonstrated a strong blend of transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, and Pan-Africanism. International connections helped Hughes develop a global understanding of the precarious conditions of blacks in both Africa and the United States and a unique form of nationalism that searched for a neat balance between essentialist and hybrid theorizing of blackness. Even if it confirmed his weariness toward racial particularism, Hughes's transnational ties with Africans during the 1966 Festival fostered his commitment to black cosmopolitan resistance against oppression and made him an iconic Pan-Africanist. Hughes employed cosmopolitanism as a tool for establishing transnational racial solidarity while recognizing the limits that disrupted individual and national identities placed on Pan-Africanism. He attempted to establish cosmopolitanism while acknowledging the challenges of monolithic identifications of blackness, as was appar-

ent during the 1960s through his ambivalent assessments of the 1966 Festival. Contrasting Hughes's ambivalent appraisals of this pivotal moment with his fascination with Négritude allows us to expose the complicated nature of his mixture of Pan-Africanism, transnationalism, and cosmopolitanism.

According to Bennetta Jules-Rosette, however, during the middle of the twentieth century "rather than addressing problems of black art and literature from an international perspective, Hughes preferred to dwell on internal debates among black American authors" (70). Jules-Rosette's statement gives the impression that Hughes was not interested in the common international issues affecting both African Americans and Africans of his generation. Hughes's involvement with the 1966 Festival suggests that he was a black transnational, cosmopolitan, and Pan-African intellectual who cared deeply about the predicament of blacks in both Africa and the diaspora as a result of traumatic experiences such as slavery and colonialism. Exploring this neglected part of Hughes's relationships with Africa shows his status as a multilayered African American voice for Africans' liberation from colonialism, racism, and other exploitations. Uncovering Hughes's commitment to end Africa's imperial predicaments requires a re-interpretation of his writings in black transnationalist and Pan-Africanist contexts. This approach will bridge the serious divide that Femi Ojo-Ade identifies when he argues that, in the face of persistent racism, "a polarization of Africans along continental and national lines can only hurt the cause of all descendants of Africa, including the African Americans who are being urged to prioritize their citizenship to the United States" (*Africans* 184). In order to break the polarization between African Americans and Africans, we need to conceptualize black identity as being Pan-African, transnational, and cosmopolitan at the same time.

"Pan-Africanism" refers to a political ideology that resists Western global oppression against blacks. Ronald Walters explains: "Speaking practically, continental Pan-Africanism is the principal task of Africans on the continent and the Black solidarity expressed in the thrust of global Pan Africanism must ultimately and essentially be translated into the struggle we as Black people wage to free ourselves right here" (*Pan Africanism* 83). Unlike Pan-Africanism, transnationalism is not restricted to black history since it is a general mode of inquiry rather than a study of particular racial or ethnic experiences. Reflecting the broad meaning of the term, Peggy Levitt and Sanjeev Khagram define "transnationalism" as the study of "contemporary social dynamics by comparing experiences within or across presumably bounded or closed societies or social units—whether they are localities, regions,

nation-states, empires, or world systems" (1). Through its emphasis on global and common histories rather than local and dissimilar experiences, transnationalism is comparable to "cosmopolitanism," which is a concept that celebrates interconnections and empathies between societies. According to Ken Plummer:

> cosmopolitanism demands a search for *common grounds* that enable us to bring our multiplicities together . . . cosmopolitanism requires a *cosmopolitan imagination* to champion a certain openness of mind, bringing with it an imaginative sensitivity to others and a lightness of perpetual doubt. As cosmopolitanism bridges social institutions, social forms and structures, so societies come to organize the recognition of these differences of others as being crucial to what counts as being human. (15-16)

My usage of the concepts of "transnationalism" and "cosmopolitanism" somewhat departs from the general meanings of these words by preceding them with the adjective "black." Therefore, in this article, "cosmopolitanism" specifically refers to the study of the hybrid social, political, cultural, and economic experiences of blacks who live in (or cross) metropolitan cities in which past and current conditions have been profoundly influenced by slavery, colonialism, and other brutal historical forces. Preceding the noun "cosmopolitanism" with the adjective "black" enables us to theorize the concept as a Pan-African and transnational intellectual tradition in which traveling people of African descent have used ideas of racial, political, or national solidarity as means to understand and resist the ways in which Europeans have subjugated them and represented them as people who have made no or little contribution to history. Moreover, black cosmopolitanism emphasizes the tense relations between the North and the South, local and transnational experiences, and the consequences of imperialism, colonization, racism, classism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia and other destructive forces on blacks worldwide. This definition of black cosmopolitanism is indebted to the groundbreaking book, *Black Cosmopolitanism: Racial Consciousness and Transnational Identity in the Nineteenth-Century Americas* (2005), in which Ifeoma Kiddoe Nwankwo theorizes the philosophy as the ways in which blacks of the Atlantic world identify themselves with notions of "race" and "nation" against oppressive European slaveowners who have appropriated these concepts and the idea of "humanity" as their preserves (10). Reflecting the agency that black cosmopolitanism entails, Nwankwo writes:

> Faced with dehumanization and the Atlantic power structures' obsession with preventing the blossoming of their cosmopolitanism, people of African descent decided to stake their claim to personhood by defining themselves in relation to the new notions of 'Black community' and ubiquitous manifestations of cosmopolitanism that the [Haitian] Revolution produced. (10-11)

Black cosmopolitanism, then, emphasizes race not as an essentialist idea, but as a philosophy that invokes political and cultural alliance to bring about social and economic transformations in both Africa and the black diaspora.

Pan-Africanism is akin to black cosmopolitanism since it also invokes race to bring about liberation from oppression. According to Nwankwo, "central to Pan-Africanism as understood by Pan-Africanist leaders and scholars then and now is political action that seeks to ameliorate the lives of all people of African descent everywhere" (11). In this sense, Pan-Africanism and black cosmopolitanism resemble black transnationalism, because the latter is also a notion that describes the common ideologies of liberation from racism and colonialism across nations that different intellectuals of African descent have debated in various times and locations. In these debates, "black transnationalism" often alludes to the efforts of blacks to free their people as well as other oppressed populations from tyranny. Michelle Stephens explains:

> Black transnationalism is *not* a universalist doctrine, but a vision of the liberation of a very particular, historical racial and class community. This vision seeks to overcome racial division by overthrowing systems of unequal power relations between races and peoples. This vision never assumes that cultural intermingling across lines of difference will occur until peoples can interact with each other on a level social, political and economic playing field. (163)

In a similar vein, Nwankwo interprets "black transnationalism" as a theory which identifies the "general physical and ideological movements across national boundaries" that people of African descent have developed to define "self" (11). Although I use the notion of "transnationalism" in a similar way, I distinguish it from the concept of "cosmopolitanism," since the former expression refers to the attempts of blacks from different regions to establish relationships with one another and with other people across national borders, while the latter expression identifies these blacks' efforts to liberate themselves from domination

and contribute to world civilizations and cultures. My differentiation of the two terms stems from my agreement with Willy Maley's rationale that to conflate "internationalism" with "cosmopolitanism" would be "spurious" and "risky," since "cosmopolitanism is a very problematic notion" (416). The tricky nature of "cosmopolitanism" is apparent in the multiple ways in which this philosophy can be theorized and the challenges one faces to reconcile this transnationalist ideology with nationalism. Yet this obstacle can be overcome by a theory of cosmopolitanism that accepts both nationalist and patriotic sentiments and their moral independence. As Kok-Chor Tan argues, in *Justice without Borders: Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism, and Patriotism*, there should be no "conceptual contradiction in endorsing cosmopolitanism about justice (which would be consistent with liberal nationalism)" (98). This alternative and liberal form of cosmopolitanism begins with the recognition of the value of oppressed groups' counter-narratives of resistance against hegemonies' meta-narratives of exploitation.

First, the Dakar festival was a pivotal Pan-African event since, as James C. Hall points out, the few "related contemporary events" with a similar "stature" include the Pan-African Conferences held in 1911, 1921, 1923, 1927, and 1945; the 1956 Congress of Black Writers in Paris; the Town Hall Debates of June 1964; and the First Fisk Black Writers Conference of 1966 (247, 241, 46). According to Hall, these meetings reflected African American writers' desire to achieve a "cultural revival," invigorate "components of [their] antimodern attitudes," "generate the energy needed to reorient American culture," and "claim an appropriate liminal space, an area of possibility, in which face-to-face relations might be engaged toward some concrete social change" (46, 47). The spirit of the above conferences stemmed from the Pan-Africanism of the 1910s when W.E.B. Du Bois and the NAACP extended their hands to Africa by initiating modern African American diplomatic cooperations with African leaders such as the Senegalese Blaise Diagne and the Beninese Kojo Tovalou-Houénou in an attempt to include them in the nationalist movements of diasporan blacks and help them defeat European colonialism. In "Fight for Freedom: The Story of the NAACP" (1962), Hughes stresses the importance of this crucial pivotal moment in the history of Pan-Africanism when he says that Du Bois took advantage of his 1921 trip to France, where he had been sent to cover the Peace Conference, to participate in the Pan-African Congress of that year. Hughes explains: "He [Du Bois] remained in France to participate in the first Pan-African Congress which he called 'to focus the attention of the peace delegates and the civilized world on the just claims of the Negro everywhere.' Delegates to the Congress included 12 Africans, 16 American Negroes, and 20 from the West Indies" ("Fight for Freedom"

65). Du Bois's participation in the 1921 Pan-African Congress in Paris was an outcome of the transnationalist effort the NAACP had been making since the 1910s to defend Africa in the realm of global affairs. Hughes explains:

> A few months before this Congress met in Paris, the NAACP had sponsored a Pan-African meeting in New York at which a resolution was adopted urging 'upon the Senate of the United States the necessity for the creation at once of an international League of Free Nations which shall be charged, among other things, with the care and protection of the peoples of Middle Africa.' Thus, toward the end of the first decade, the National Association's interest had extended to Africa and embraced such international concerns as those with which the destiny of all the colored peoples of the world, including those in America, could not help but be entangled. ("Fight for Freedom" 65)

The NAACP and Du Bois's willingness to place Africa's concerns at the center of American foreign policy in the early twentieth century is the transnational and cosmopolitan African American political and intellectual tradition that gave Hughes his first education in Pan-Africanism. Hughes expanded this education by participating in the First World Festival of Negro Arts that had the same internationalist goals that Du Bois, the NAACP, and their African colleagues had in their attempts to free blacks of the diaspora and Africa from the legacies of slavery and European colonialism. Like the early Pan-African Congresses, the 1966 Festival originated from the resolve of blacks of the diaspora and of Africa to use their marginal spaces in Western and African societies as sites where they could gather the intellectual and cultural power that would enable them to defeat racism and colonialism and develop alternative visions of development and modernity. The festival exemplified Pan-Africanism as well as black transnationalism and cosmopolitanism, since it resulted from the determination of mid-twentieth century black intellectuals from around the world to place Africa at the center of their preoccupations.

Reflecting a similar genuine bond with Africa, the delegates of the Second Congress of Negro Writers and Artists that took place in Rome in 1959 suggested that Africans sponsor the future event that was later known as the 1966 First World Festival of Negro Arts. As Snipe observes, it was during the 1959 summit that the members of the Society of African Culture (Société Africaine de Culture) decided "that a black African arts festival should be held in Dakar" (55). The SAC's mem-

bers included Alioune Diop (the founder of *Présence Africaine*), David Nicol (a Sierra Leonean writer and later Vice President of the Royal African Society), Richard Wright (the author of *Black Boy* and *Native Son*), and Senghor.[1] According to Nicol, the SAC was formed during the two days following the 1956 First Congress of Black Writers in Paris when Diop had summoned a few of his colleagues to gather in a room located on the Left Bank of Paris to discuss the objectives and acronym of the association and convene the Rome Congress (8). Sharing a similar purpose, African Americans who attended the 1956 Paris Congress later created a branch of the SAC entitled American Society of African Culture.[2] The founding of the SAC represented Pan-Africanism as well as black transnationalism and cosmopolitanism since it emerged from the exchange of ideas among black intellectuals from Africa, the United States, and the Caribbean during the mid-twentieth century when the meaning of blackness was being debated in all its complexity. Nicol writes:

> The 'Association for Negro Culture' was put forward, but 'Society' seemed to sound better, in French particularly. 'Negro' caused us some trouble as there were genuine and sincere artists and writers from Africa who were not Negro but Arab or European, and we did not want to exclude them, even though 'Negro' to Afro-Americans was still an acceptable and honourable term and not a derogatory term for bourgeois collaborator integrationists. The 'Society for Black Culture' was then put forward, but the Afro-Americans again had, quite rightly, some misgivings as not all Negroes were black. 'Black', incidentally, had not yet become 'beautiful'. Alioune Diop suggested the 'Society for African Culture' and we all agreed. (8)

Diop's conception of blackness epitomized Pan-Africanism as well as black transnationalism and cosmopolitanism because it incorporated the opinions of blacks of both the diaspora and Africa in an attempt to reflect the diversity of their views about their experiences in the modern world. This respect for plurality in Négritude led both Diop and Senghor to seek the suggestions of Hughes, Wright, and other black diasporan intellectuals about their common intellectual projects. For instance, as Arnold Rampersad states, "Drawing up plans in the late 1940s for the magazine *Présence Africaine*, which would soon be the most influential journal of African cultural debate, Alioune Diop had solicited Langston's advice and counsel. From Paris, the poet Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal, long an admirer [of Hughes], had also corresponded with him on similar matters" (*The Life of Langston* 237).

By seeking Hughes's contributions, Wright, Diop and Senghor (who were part of the founders of the African section of the SAC), showed cosmopolitanism through their intention to create a group that united their history of oppression and cultural resistance with those of blacks of the diaspora without flattening their shared experiences into essentialist conceptions of race, ethnicity, or identity. Diop and the other black intellectuals demonstrated the ability to accommodate other perspectives on blackness that reflected the racial and cultural hybridism within and beyond their individual selves, showing that they did not intend to homogenize the multiplicity of black peoples and traditions even if they called their organization Society of African Culture.

Yet the diverse blacks were united by a similar history of struggle in slavery and colonization which had allowed whites to exploit their human and economic resources. In *The Wretched of the Earth: A Negro Psychoanalyst's Study of the Problems of Racism and Colonialism in the World Today* (1963), Frantz Fanon alludes to this comparable experience of blacks when he declares: "The Negroes who live in the United States and in Central or Latin America in fact experience the need to attach themselves to a cultural matrix. Their problem is not fundamentally different from that of the Africans. The whites of America did not mete out to them any different treatment from that of the whites that ruled over the Africans" (174). This shared experience of oppression and struggle inspired the African, Caribbean, and African American intellectuals who founded the SAC to use this organization as a means to extend the search for transnational connections among blacks worldwide that the *Présence Africaine* journal had begun in 1947. As Mildred A. Hill-Lubin points out, the objectives of both this journal and the SAC was to promote "the vision of Black unity" that would strengthen or create "a bond linking Blacks transnationally" and "to provide a platform for a dialogue among Blacks, both in Africa and the diaspora" who were "unsung," "unacknowledged," and "unpublished" (158). The First World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar contributed to this global effort to establish Pan-African and black transnational and cosmopolitan ties, since it aimed to create a viable intellectual and political climate in which blacks of different nations could explore their common experiences without perceiving themselves as a special people who shared a fixed African nationality or identity. By seeing themselves as diverse people from various nations who were linked by similar and different African cultures and a genuine desire to help humanity, these blacks anticipated the sense of open-mindedness toward hybridity that Achille Mbembe identifies as cosmopolitanism. In *Black France: Colonialism, Immigration, and Transnationalism* (2007), Dominic Thomas theorizes Mbembe's cosmopolitanism as "'the idea of a *common world*, of a

common humanity, or a shared history and future' that would in turn negate the inclination of official discourse to seek 'refuge behind the purely ahistoric mask of universalism in order to claim more assertively its move beyond race'" (210).[3] The continental and diasporan black intellectuals and artists who attended the 1966 Dakar Festival demonstrated this cosmopolitanism by using the event as an opportunity to forge a political alliance and a cultural platform that gave them a voice in the modern world without erasing the diversity of geographic areas and cultures from which they came.

Moreover, as Joseph McLaren points out, "In 1966, Hughes was a delegate to the First World Festival of Negro Arts held in Dakar, Senegal" (91). Hughes played a vital role in this pivotal moment because he presided over a panel that judged the numerous literary prizes that were awarded to the winning black writers and artists at the ceremony.[4] Nicol, who also attended this momentous experience, says in his tribute to Diop that Hughes, "[who] he had known in Harlem" and "grew to admire more in Dakar," had presided over the panel with "benign authority" (9). Moreover, in Dakar, Hughes had the opportunity to meet major African American figures such as Katherine Dunham and Josephine Baker. According to Jean-Claude Baker, in April 1966, Hughes dined in Dakar with these two black women icons and other African American dignitaries, such as Mercer Cook and Arna Bontemps, at a table where the latter scholar complimented him as "'the ideal person' to do a biography of Josephine" (386). Bontemps's tribute attests to Hughes's close relationships with Baker in a Pan-African, transnational, and cosmopolitan setting where he witnessed the fruitful and loose interaction between the African American artists and Francophone cultures. While Hughes was born with African American traditions, it was the transnational reverberation of this civilization across the French Atlantic world that inspired him to infuse African American musical rhythms into his poems. In the documentary film, *Langston Hughes: The Dream Keeper* (1995), Hughes says that hearing African American jazz bands play in the Grand Duc hotel in Paris, where he worked as a dishwasher for a few months in 1924, influenced him to incorporate the syncopation of African American music and dance into his poetry.[5] Hughes's ability to regain his African American roots from sounds he heard in Paris suggests the transnational and cosmopolitan nature of an African American identity that echoed in the Francophone world before journeying to the vortex that Annalisa Oboe and Anna Scacchi have identified as the "circumatlantic" space.[6]

Living in Paris in 1924 enabled Hughes to flow in and draw on the "circumatlantic" space and expand the Pan-Africanism, transnationalism, and cosmopolitanism that were already sowed in his conscious-

ness during the Harlem Renaissance. In this sense, Hughes's relations with Baker go back to the 1920s when both of them imbibed the multidimensionality of blackness through the cosmopolitanism of Harlem. As Jean-Claude Baker and Chris Chase note, in 1923, Hughes lived in a building in Harlem not far from those of Josephine Baker and other African American artists such as Lena Horne and Alberta Hunter, who were at the start of their artistic careers (xix-xx). Living in a diverse city such as Harlem instilled in Hughes a love for transnationalism and cosmopolitanism, as is visible in his desire to travel to many places in the world and learn and write about various cultures. This blend of transnationalism and cosmopolitanism can be considered as the starting points of Hughes's immersion into a community of African American artists and writers, including Du Bois, Wright, and James Baldwin, who had also traveled to or lived in Africa and France to cement their Pan-Africanisms.

Consequently, Hughes's travels to Africa placed him in the canon of pioneer African American Pan-Africanist intellectuals who experienced cultural pluralism in transnational and cosmopolitan contexts by going abroad in search of both roots and diversity. Discussing the motivation of African American quests of pluralism and tradition, Farah J. Griffin and Cheryl J. Fish note, in the introduction of *A Stranger in the Village: Two Centuries of African-American Travel Writing* (1998): "African-American mobility is often connected to the impulse for increased opportunities and the desire to find a home or homeland as well as the purpose of pilgrimage, exile, pleasure; thus, it is both unique and typical of the urge that many people have had throughout history in the quest for improvement and the claim for new dwelling places" (xiii). Hughes was one of these pioneer black transnationalists and cosmopolitans because he was heavily drawn by the various opportunities of international travel and experience. Even if he was poor and had no permanent job in 1923, Hughes enjoyed the chance of being in new cultural environments where he experienced original forms of hybridism that he had not seen in America. Besides, in *I Wonder as I Wander*, Hughes confesses that poverty and racism did not prevent him from having fun during his travels to Africa and Europe. He states: "I had been broke or almost broke in so many other cities around the world—and still had fun—that my personal predicament didn't worry me much" (402). This declaration suggests Hughes's appreciation of transnationalism and cosmopolitanism when he was able to create a porous and permeable individual identity and anonymity abroad that weakened the poverty and agony that he experienced in the tense and rigid climate of racism and singularity at home.

Hughes's blend of transnationalism and cosmopolitanism is also visible in the speech entitled "Black Writers in a Troubled World" that he gave at the Dakar festival on March 26, 1966. In this address, Hughes celebrated black cultures without failing to recognize their intimate relationships with those of the other people in the world. Preferring transnationalism and cosmopolitanism over parochialism, Hughes developed a theory of black culture that refuted the legitimacy of racial essentialism. In his festival speech, he denounced young African American writers of the Black Arts Movement, such as Leroi Jones and Charles Wright, who were "going to the other extreme and insisting on being blacker than black" in an attempt "to keep from being whiteized" ("Black Writers in a Troubled World" 477). While he recognized the dilemma of racism that compelled these black writers to distance themselves from white American culture and express "their angry frustration" against it, Hughes did not accept "the dirtiest words in the [English] language" that these authors often used to describe this culture (477). According to Hughes, these writers became "America's prophets of doom, black ravens cawing over carrions" (475) because they were suffering from the same pessimism and "obscenities" of an American society which was "falling to pieces, going to the dogs, stewing in its own iniquity, and bogged down in the gutters of Saigon" (474). For Hughes, the pessimism and "obscenities" of American society during the Vietnam War led many black writers to essentialize their blackness and further deny their ties to the United States. In this vein, Hughes decries how Jones and Wright radically emphasized their blackness to the extreme while Jean Toomer, the "author of a single highly acclaimed book, *Cane*, [which is] filled with the sadness and beauty of life in the black South, went 'white'" and "never wrote anything else worthwhile" (477).

Yet, Hughes's repudiation of racial essentialism contradicts his ephemeral romanticizations of racial primitivism in his earlier writings and reflects the duality that he felt during the 1960s toward the particularity of blackness that he often celebrated in the 1920s. David Chinitz captures the core of Hughes's dilemma during the 1960s when he states: "Primitivism, at any rate, fetched African Americans credit at far too high a price. While it proffered a kind of respect, this respect made real acceptance and integration finally less rather than more achievable. Hughes found himself in a middle position, trying to affirm in effect that African Americans were different, but not *that* different" (68). In an attempt to liberate the black writer from the impasse of racial primitivism and essentialism, Hughes found a solution in Négritude where Pan-Africanism harmoniously cohabits with transnationalism and cosmopolitanism. Fascinated with Négritude writers,

Hughes recommended the balanced ways in which Senghor celebrated blackness without rejecting its relationships to whiteness and other world identities. Referring to Senghor's influence on his conception of Négritude, Hughes defines the philosophy as a theory that "has its roots deep in the beauty of black people—in what the younger writers and musicians of America call 'soul'" ("Black Writers in a Troubled World" 477). Defining this concept, Hughes writes:

> *Soul* is a synthesis of the essence of Negro folk art redistilled—particularly the old music and its flavor, the ancient basic beat out of Africa, the folk rhymes and Ashanti stories—expressed in contemporary ways so definitely and emotionally colored with the old, that it gives a distinctly 'Negro' flavor of today's music, painting or writing—or even to merely personal attitudes and daily conversation. *Soul* is contemporary Harlem's *negritude*, revealing to the Negro people and the world the beauty within themselves. (477)

This quotation reflects Hughes's theorizing of Négritude as a concept that allows blacks of both Africa and the diaspora to use traditions as a means for redistilling, refining, and re-inventing their cultures and identities, and for practical reasons such as the enhancement of the self-esteem that comes from the adoration of one's inherent beauty, folk-tales, music, painting, and literature. Hughes's concept of Négritude stemmed from his "unashamed" and "unapologetic" acceptance of the multiple dimensions of his African American heritage. Developing in Harlem an ideology that later inspired Négritude, Hughes wrote in his 1925 essay, "The Negro and the Racial Mountain" (1925):

> We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. 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 doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves. (48)

Hughes's declaration reflects a Pan-Africanist notion of a black personality that expresses itself without "fear" or "shame" of criticism or ridicule from both whites and blacks. Hughes's assertion characterizes a pivotal moment when the writers of the Harlem Renaissance grew

tired of pandering to white audiences who expected them to represent black traditions in terms of exoticism and stereotypes mainly. Resisting this thirst for primitivistic imagery of black cultures, Harlem authors decided to express themselves realistically—as they truly felt and saw themselves, rather than as outsiders perceived them—thus developing a Pan-Africanist theory of black intellectual and artistic self-esteem. In this vein, Eugene C. Holmes interprets Hughes's 1925 manifesto as the "spiritual emancipation" and "literary declaration of independence" of African American writers and artists who "had outgrown the handicaps of allowing didactic emphasis and propagandist motives to choke their sense of artistry" and "turned inward to the Negro audience in frankly avowed self-expression" (61-62). This manifesto was Pan-Africanist because its emphasis on self-expression had strong influences on Négritude writers, especially on Senghor who considered it as Hughes's major contribution to the movement. According to Raymond Smith, when Senghor was asked in a 1967 interview "in which poems of our, American, literature [do] you find evidence of Negritude?" his reply was: "Ah, in Langston Hughes; Langston Hughes is the most spontaneous as a poet and the blackest in expression" (120). Senghor's confession registers his admiration for Hughes's unashamed and fearless acceptance of his black identity and his belief in the positive impact that this Pan-Africanism could have on the development of African Négritude. In a documentary entitled W. E. B. Du Bois: a Biography in Four Voices (1995), Senghor acknowledges the fundamental role Hughes had in the formation of Négritude through the Harlem Renaissance, which gave African Francophone writers images and symbols of black pride and culture that inspired them to study the richness of their traditions and history.[7] Therefore, Hughes's impact on Négritude was transnational since it allowed the cosmopolitan acceptance of blackness that empowered the Harlem Renaissance to spread to the rest of world, beyond the "circumatlantic" space that had already taken African American culture to Europe.

Hughes's Pan-Africanist, transnational, and cosmopolitan contributions to Négritude can also be ascertained in the essay, "Negritude: A Humanism of the Twentieth Century" (1970), where Senghor describes the African American poet's concept of "African personality" as an equivalent of the "'black personality' discovered and proclaimed by the American New Negro movement" that Hughes expressed in "The Negro and the Racial Mountain" (27). Senghor praises Hughes for saying that "We, the creators of the new generation, want to give expression to our black personality without shame or fear. . . . We know we are handsome. Ugly as well. The drums weep and the drums laugh" (27). Senghor admired Hughes's representation of race as a useful tool

of resistance against European oppression and stereotypes. Hughes's employment of race as an effective means of resistance against colonialism was beneficial to Senghor who perceived Négritude as a Pan-African, transnational, and cosmopolitan concept of black subalternity which arose from the philosophy of "black personality" in African American literature and was refined by both Césaire (who had coined the term Négritude) and him "as a weapon, as an instrument of liberation and as a contribution to the humanism of the twentieth century" (27).

In return, Hughes's Négritude was very much influenced by Senghor's theory of cosmopolitanism. This impact is apparent in "The Black Writer in a Troubled World" in which Hughes lauds the creative ways in which Senghor's poetry could inspire writers of the Black Arts Movement to perceive their celebration of black culture not as an egotistical or selfish activity, but as a means to connect with the rest of the world. Hughes asserts: "If one may ascribe a prime function to any creative writing, it is, I think, to affirm life, to yeah-say the excitement of living in relation to the vast rhythms of the universe of which we are a part, to untie the riddles of the gutter in order to closer tie the knot between man and God" (478). This passage reinforces Hughes's cosmopolitanism, which is perceptible in his belief in the interdependent relationships between black people and the other human beings that inhabit the universe. For Hughes, these intimacies can help Americans bridge the abyss that led them to be "bogged down in the gutters of Saigon" and work to overcome "obscenities" and pessimism which prevent them from moving toward an appreciation of one another (474). Hughes's cosmopolitanism is further noticeable in his desire to use Négritude literature as a source of model writings and an instrument of peace, love, and affection that can assuage the racial and ethnic divisions in America and in the rest of the world. In his Dakar festival address, Hughes declared:

> As to Negro writing and writers, one of our aims, it seems to me, should be to gather the strength of our people in Africa and the Americas into a tapestry of words as strong as the bronzes of Benin, the memories of Songhay and Mele, the war cry of Chaka, the beat of the blues, and the Uhuru of African freedom, and give it to the world with pride and love, and the kind of humanity and affection that Senghor put into his poem *To The American Negro Troop* when he said:
>
> Oh, black brothers,
> warriors whose mouths are singing flowers—

> Delight of living when winter is over—
> You I salute as messengers of peace! (478)

These two passages attest to Hughes's perception of black literature as an art form that should promote Pan-Africanism, transnationalism, and cosmopolitanism at the same time through an assembly and appreciation of cultural forms and images drawn from the various places where African-descended people live in order to fight for world freedom and tranquility. Therefore, Hughes wants black literature to be open to a world to which it contributes insights from and for various cultures. He imagined blackness in multidimensional terms since he theorized it as both an essential and plural identity that should advocate a black communal use of peaceful relations with the world as a means for promoting both self-awareness and global citizenship. This mixture of Pan-Africanism, transnationalism, and cosmopolitanism is evident in Patrick Hayden's definition of the latter philosophy as an ideology which recognizes that "the security of the human person requires the promotion and protection of core values, and the reconstruction of local, national, and international social environments and political relations which favour increased safety, freedom and well-being" (67).

Moreover, Hughes's participation in the First World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar allowed him to promote freedom and peace in a transnational context in which he developed a cosmopolitanism that embraced both racial and trans-racial solidarity. Hughes's acceptance of racial solidarity is manifest in his biography in which Rampersad says that "Hughes emerged as one of the festival's most conspicuous celebrities" and was honored when "young writers from all over Africa followed him about the city [of Dakar] and haunted his hotel the way American youngsters dog favorite baseball players" (*The Life of Langston Hughes* 400). The star-quality fascination and welcome that Hughes received at the Dakar Festival registers his popularity in a continent in which people were familiar with African American writers of the Harlem Renaissance era who made them proud of their Africanity. As Rampersad suggests, "the name Langston Hughes was hardly unknown in Africa. His evocative poems on the beauty of blackness had gained him readers there [...] among Africans in Europe, since the 1920s" and

> many African writers [who] were grateful to Hughes for having composed so many poems that defied the myths of black ugliness and inferiority. A young Gold Coast poet, citing certain sonorous lines from 'The Negro'—'Black as the night is

> black, / Black like the depths of Africa'—admitted to worshipping the author of the poem. Similarly, a black woman from Johannesburg, South Africa, told simply of her pride in knowing that the celebrated author Langston Hughes actually was a man of color. (237)

The sentiments of the Ghanaian author and the South African woman reveal the considerable and symbolic role that Hughes's work and presence had at the Dakar festival by inspiring Africans to be proud of their race and cultures and fight for freedom and equality both locally and transnationally. This global racial solidarity that Hughes inspired through his presence at the 1966 festival was a continuation of the nineteenth-century form of African American transnationalism (of Martin R. Delany) that Nwankwo describes in *Black Cosmopolitanism* as "a vision of transnational Black collectivism" for "the imagining and enacting of transnational Black interaction" (60). Hughes made strong imprints in this historical black transnationalism and cosmopolitanism by using his involvement with the 1966 Festival and his contacts with Senghor as tools for ascertaining his strong interests in Africa and his deep concerns about the traumatic impact of Western colonialism on diverse populations. Understanding the global plight of Africans and their struggles to define their identities helped Hughes fathom the dilemma of African Americans who were going through a similar process of self-reckoning during the middle of the twentieth century.

Hughes's writings about the 1966 First World Festival of Negro Arts reveal his awareness of the stark connections between blacks of Africa and the United States during the middle of the twentieth century. Both populations relied on the blend of black self-love and acceptance of the other, which both the Harlem Renaissance and Négritude celebrated, as means of inventing a blended philosophy of Pan-Africanism, transnationalism, and cosmopolitanism that undergirded their worldviews. The Dakar festival was instrumental in this history since it allowed Hughes to further explore his relationships with Senghor and other black writers and artists of the mid-twentieth century. The Dakar festival also enabled Hughes to theorize blackness as a tool for developing fluid and hybrid forms of cosmopolitanism and transnationalism that conveyed his creative Pan-African struggle for black liberation and independence and his respect for world cultures and peace. Hughes's Pan-Africanism, transnationalism, and cosmopolitanism are not parochial or essentialist since they celebrate black self-esteem as well as acceptance of cultural diversity and plurality.

Notes

1. See Edwards, 274; Nicol, 8; Fanon, 189.

2. As Drake points out, after the 1956 Paris Congress, "A number of Americans then proceeded to organize the American Society for African Culture (AMSAC)" (573).

3. See also Mbembe, 140, 153.

4. See "Perspectives," 88; Nicol, 9; Rampersad and Rossel, 19.

5. See Bourne, *Langston Hughes*.

6. See Oboe and Scacchi, 2.

7. See Massiah, *W. E. B. Du Bois*.

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About the Author

Dr. M'Baye teaches Pan-African literatures and cultures at Kent State University. He is the author of *Black Cosmopolitanism and Anticolonialism: Pivotal Moments* (Routledge, 2017), *The Trickster Comes West: Pan-African Influence in Early Black Diasporan Narratives* (UP of Mississippi, 2009), and the co-editor of *Crossing Traditions: American Popular Music in Local and Global Contexts* (Scarecrow P, 2013).

Transnational Identities and the Crisis of Modernity: The Slave Narratives of Juan Francisco Manzano and Mary Prince

Nereida Segura-Rico

In *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) the British sociologist Paul Gilroy uses the concept of double consciousness to characterize the nature of the cultural production of blacks in the Americas. His examination of the significance of slavery as the experience in which that double consciousness is rooted presents it as inseparably critical of, and internal to, modernity. Gilroy does not contrast the culture of modernity with that of the Black Atlantic in order to place modern black experiences merely outside, or against, occidental rationality. Rather, he reconsiders the role of slavery in creating an ideal of progress in which the enslavement of human beings performs a central role. Gilroy's evaluation of modernity in its "indebtedness" to the politics and economics of the system that started with the Middle Passage allows for an examination of slavery that conceives of it as little more than "the site of black victimage and thus of tradition's intended erasure" (189).

If slavery can be inscribed at the center of the experience of modernity it is precisely due to the idea of double consciousness as a product, but also an enabler, of the lives that were born out of those who survived the middle passage. Having taken that concept of double consciousness from W.E.B. Du Bois as he formulated it in his *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Gilroy appropriates this notion to signify a fragmented subject that has been, more often than not, excluded from a definition of modernity in which universalist claims have been made regarding the unified experience of the modern subject across national, ethnic, and gender boundaries (46). Gilroy not only questions the celebratory rhetoric of the West regarding the achievement of its project of the modern, but he also takes that Western subject out of his or her unencumbered protagonism, making, in turn, this subject's experience contingent upon the fragmentation of other modern subjectivities in less privileged global positions.

Even if we agree with Gilroy that for Du Bois to possess a double consciousness "is neither simply a disability nor a constant privilege" (Du

Bois 161), Du Bois perceived such a condition as having a wrenching effect in the extreme modalities of action and active politics available to blacks and to which they would be inexorably driven: "Such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes, must give rise to double words and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretence or revolt, to hypocrisy or radicalism" (Du Bois 142). Gilroy rewrites the relationship, as outlined by DuBois, between pretence/hypocrisy and revolt/radicalism into what he calls "politics of fulfillment" and "politics of transfiguration." He defines those two different tactics in the following way:

> The politics of fulfillment is mostly content to play occidental rationality at its own game. It necessitates a hermeneutic orientation that can assimilate the semiotic, verbal, and textual. The politics of transfiguration strives in pursuit of the sublime, struggling to repeat the unrepeatable, to present the unpresentable. Its rather different hermeneutic focus pushes toward mimetic, dramatic, and performative. (38)

Only a politics of transfiguration can enact a series of relationships of solidarity and resistance through which the black vernacular can keep its presence.[1] However, Gilroy displaces the centrality of written texts as the privileged locus of expression to focus on the articulation of a particular consciousness in musical compositions and performance.[2]

We can benefit from Gilroy's analysis of a transnational black culture while qualifying it with the specific circumstances of the history of the nations in which these cultures developed in order to account for different, and varied, subaltern responses to the experience of slavery and, by extension, to other "postcolonial conditions." My analysis of *The History of Mary Prince* (1831) and of Juan Francisco Manzano's *Autobiography* (1840) centers on the conflicts between modernity and colonialism that govern the conditions of productions of these texts. I emphasize their testimonial value concerning economic, social and political circumstances under colonialism. In discussing how the critical reception of Juan Francisco Manzano's narrative has evaluated the text in terms of its autobiographical function, I highlight the importance of other types of discursive forms, such as the discourse of the law, to explain some of the features of Manzano's text. Despite being a narrative written by the slave himself, the writing inscribes the orality of the moment of enunciation. As it shows the limitations of writing, as an imitative practice, to represent the crisis of the self in which the discourse of modernity situates the slave, Manzano's narrative comes to occupy a position between what Gilroy describes as "mimetic" and

"transfigurative" practices of resistance. Even though Manzano does not consciously employ the act of self-dramatization as a vehicle, as Gilroy defines it, through which to recuperate a memory of slavery as a locus of critique of modernity, the need to represent with the body the process of verbal mimesis foregrounds the shortcomings of a sanctioned language to reflect on certain kinds of experiences. Manzano is searching for a particular style of telling, one that uses "autobiographical self-dramatisation and public self-construction" as a means of insubordination, if not to create a counterculture, to challenge from within the tenants of Western ideals (Gilroy 200).

Similarly, Mary Prince enacts a powerful testimonial stance against the institution of slavery, providing an insightful examination of the economic dimensions of the slave trade. By comparing the situation of the working class in England at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution and that of the slaves, Prince shows that she is fully aware of how intrinsic slavery is to modernity and capitalism. This understanding of the interconnection of the discourses of power endows her narrative with an authority that is located outside the act of writing itself and that wrests away the sanctioning value of the documents appended to her story. In breaking out of the binary opposition of writing versus orality, collaboration versus resistance, personal versus collective, and metropolis versus periphery, both accounts open up the space for the construction of a transnational subject that challenges the discourse of historical progress of the Enlightenment. Furthermore, the transnational dimensions of these texts demarcate the Atlantic as a space of reconfiguration of the different conditions under which slaves find themselves in national contexts. While, as fugitive slaves, Manzano and Prince call attention to their experiences as a "lingering limbo," their texts explode the ambiguous condition of that liminality to expose the construction of black modern subjectivities.[3]

Juan Franciso Manzano's *Autobiography* and "The Politics of Fulfillment"

First published in Britain in 1840, Manzano's narrative is a perfect example for the study of the international dimensions of slavery. Juan Francisco Manzano was still a slave when he started to write the narrative of his life at the request of Domingo Del Monte, a member of the Cuban bourgeoisie whose literary circle provided a forum where the opponents of slavery could foster a Cuban literature, read each other's works, and voice their opinions regarding the future of the island and its black population.[4] Another member of this circle, Anselmo Suárez

y Romero, also prompted by Del Monte, wrote his antislavery novel *Francisco, el ingenio; o, Las delicias del campo* (*Francisco, The sugar mill; or, The delights of the country*) in 1839, although it was not published until 1880. Suárez y Romero was the first to correct and edit the manuscript that the Irish magistrate, Richard Madden, would, in turn, translate in order to present it at the General Anti-Slavery Convention that took place in London in 1840. In a letter to Del Monte, Suárez y Romero vows to have limited his corrections to the orthography and prosody, remarking that, unlike his fictional Francisco, nothing in Manzano's autobiography has been invented and that his suffering is real. Del Monte and his circle, praising Manzano's literary abilities, collected the necessary amount of money to pay for his manumission in 1836.

The colonialist rhetoric of the metropolis allowed only for the timid expression of national discourses, which affected all the sectors of the Cuban population, and specifically, the relationship between the population of African descent and the liberal, Creole, bourgeoisie. Manzano's narrative exemplifies all the constraints imposed on the voice of the slave, thus constituting a unique testimony of and to his time.[5] Moreover, because of his solitary standing in Cuba as a black and slave "autobiographer," Manzano has become a central figure for studies and debates regarding not only the response of Cuban slaves to slavery but also the formation of a black expression in nineteenth-century Cuba. A review of Manzano's narrative and poems that appeared in Britain in *The Christian Observer* in 1841 offers a pointed example of the significance of the narrative in a transnational context, placing its protagonist at the center of the international vortex created by the enforcement of the total suppression of the slave trade by England. The review justifies the need to expose the painful details of Manzano's life in order to denounce the contraband of slaves to Cuba after England had abolished the slave trade in 1807, having "lavished millions upon millions of treasure, to put an end to the slave trade" and having spent "twenty millions of money" to abolish slavery in her own colonies (*The Slave Narrative* 18).[6]

Therefore, due to the censorship in Cuba, the narrative of Manzano had to come to light first in a foreign language and in a foreign country.[7] After Cuba abolished slavery in 1886, well after Manzano's death in 1853, some excerpts of his life appeared in Cuba in Francisco Calcagno's *Poetas de color* (1879). Sylvia Molloy, in her study of the production of autobiography and its changing relationship with the European metropolis, points out that the text "was considered unpublishable while Cuba remained under Spanish rule" (38). This remark underscores the inseparability of independence matters from those concerning the

lives of the black population of the island. The evaluation and interpretation of Manzano's narrative emphasizes the liminal status of the text as a counter discourse by an enslaved other not only within the discourse of slavery but also within the nationalist discourse of twentieth-century Cuba.

Unlike most slave narratives in the United States, Manzano's narrative comes without authoritative prefaces or notes of the editor that provide the expected information regarding the circumstances under which it was written and the people who collaborated in its composition, or made it possible. The function of those paratextual pieces is fulfilled by the letters that Manzano wrote to Del Monte, published together with his poetry by José Luciano Franco in 1937 in the first edition in Cuba of the *Autobiografía*. In the "Introduction" to this edition, Franco describes Manzano as not very robust and prone to crying in the face of adverse fortune due to his *carabalí* ancestry (26). This is also the image offered by an article in a Cuban journal in 1934 about black and mestizo poets during slavery that makes a reference to Manzano's then-unpublished narrative. Despite the article's effort to provide the social and historical context within which to judge more fairly the poetic production of slaves in their the lack of inclusion of Afro-Cuban elements, it depicts Manzano as passive, resigned, fatalistic, easy to adapt and able to endure the most insufferable pain, characteristics that, the writer concludes, are inherent to his race.[8] Calcagno in his *Poetas de Color* remarks that, despite his sufferings and slave status, Manzano's tone is only slightly sarcastic or accusatory.[9] Calcagno highlights the fact that, in his writings, Manzano separates himself from those Africans who have become brutalized and do not have any self-esteem because they only conceive of themselves as slaves.[10]

All these commentaries offer a rather essentialist analysis of Juan Francisco Manzano, based on notions of him as representative of the cultural production of slaves in Cuba and also as the spokesperson for a black identity, thus establishing *a priori* judgments of his persona based on a rather static concept of race and racial difference that does not allow an audience, otherwise generally sympathetic to the plight of the slaves, to acknowledge the expression of a multilayered subjectivity. The Cuban literary critic Roberto Friol's *Suite para Juan Francisco Manzano* (1977) is one of the first studies that takes a different direction in the assessment of the cultural production of blacks in the history of Cuba, echoing the changes in the study of slavery and slave narratives in the United States and other areas of the black diaspora. It focuses, at different levels, on the textual relations, or "clash of voices," that Manzano's writings enact within his historical context. Yet, in Friol's commentaries regarding the supposed imperfections of Manzano's

writing and the sentiments expressed in the *Autobiography*, it is possible to detect an idealization of the figure of the slave whose lack of affectation attests to the authenticity and profound humanity of the voice thereby represented.[11] Manzano's disregard for the conventions of written language in the *Autobiography* is even more remarkable when compared with his polished poetic compositions. This contrast has led to evaluations of the *Autobiography* as a defective text, ultimately lacking in meaning.[12]

If in his poetry the aesthetics of Neoclassicism and Romanticism provide Manzano with rhetorical constructions that can obliterate the memories of tortures and vexations, his narrative presents a more immediate recollection of these episodes. The immediacy of his prosaic account powerfully communicates the material realities of his enslavement, including the continuation of his condition of bondage as he composes his narrative, which puts him in a compromising situation, to say the least. Thus, the feelings of anguish and despair that punctuate his account are as much the product of the nature of the events being told as of his tenuous position as he narrates the abuses that have been inflicted upon him. Thus, it is only possible to talk about lack of meaning in Manzano's *Autobiography* when we evaluate the text as a unified process of identity construction. Manzano's account explodes the expectations governing the autobiographical accounts by slaves regarding their structure and rhetorical and narrative techniques. Not forming part of a larger corpus of Cuban slave narratives, nor having access to autobiographical accounts by other slaves, Manzano's *Autobiography* shows through the interstices of its "different" writing the contradictions imposed on the slave by a discourse of progress that is based on the exploitation of human beings.

Against the Enlightenment idea of progress, Manzano significantly conceives his life as a series of repetitions of events of punishment coupled with a recurring bafflement as to the causes for these acts, which renders him incapable of offering a "meaningful" explanation according both to the coordinates of reason and of a sanctioned language.[13] Manzano's expressed intention, in one of his letters to Del Monte, to record only the most significant events of his life as a slave, explains the somewhat discontinuous character of the narrative line and qualifies the type of account that Manzano wants to produce: "If I tried to offer an exact summary of the story of my life, it would be a repetition of the same type of events because since I was thirteen or fourteen my life has been a succession of punishment, imprisonment, whippings and afflictions so I determined to write the most relevant episodes that have generated such terrible and damaging opinions of me" (51).[14]

Addressing Del Monte's directive that he write a story of his life, Manzano very tellingly expresses his desire to produce another kind of narrative and write "a true Cuban novel," a project that he hopes to accomplish once he settles into a more stable life (85). Even though the *Autobiography* shows his desire to comply with Del Monte's wishes, Manzano's "incoherent" and "faulty" writing constitutes the all-too-revealing marks of the crisis produced by the demands exerted on his persona by the discourse of progress in Cuba. He sees himself as an integral part of the nation through the construction of a proper Cuban novel based on his own "wonderful" experiences (85). Given this expressed desire to construct a fiction of the nation that in order to be properly Cuban cannot but incorporate the experiences of slavery, it is not hard to trace in the opening paragraph of the *Autobiography* the beginning of a novel of sorts: "Every time that Doña Beatriz de Justiz Marchioness of Santa Ana, wife of Don Juan Manzano went to her plantation of El Molino, she would take the most beautiful Creole girls, when they were ten or eleven years old . . . " (33).

Even if, as Sylvia Molloy argues, there is no master image after which Manzano can fashion himself in his *Autobiography*, Manzano can, however, imagine himself as part of the romance of the nation, as detailed in the anti-slavery novel with which he was well acquainted through the works of the members of the circle of Del Monte.[15] Trapped in a national and personal instability, Manzano can only convey a true representation of the man he imagines himself to be in a fiction of the formation of the Cuban nation in which he will be able to participate as an integral character, legitimated through the very same act of writing. The autobiography shows the changes that Manzano's account brings to the aesthetic of romantic sacrifice, to the role of the good slave as presented by the title characters of novels such as Anselmo Suárez y Romero's *Francisco* (1839) or Gertrudis Gómez Avellaneda's *Sab* (1841). He not only escapes from his mistress but also claims his legitimate place in the fabric of Cuban society first by calling attention to his rhetorical abilities, through which he enacts a metaphorical identification with his master, and, secondly, by disputing his objectification by his mistress, based on the unique subjectivity that he is claiming for himself. It is the articulation of a position between assimilation and sublimation, between "fulfillment" and "transfiguration," that allows him to depict his mistress's actions as the product of an irrational fixation on economic gain born out of the ownership of human beings. In the face of that irrationality, Manzano presents himself as a rational human being who has a knowledge of letters but whose writing exposes the limitations of that knowledge in order to present the unpresentable, which includes the liminal space that he has been made to occupy.

He constructs himself as a moral character not through the development of a dialectical argument with those who defend the slave system, as Mary Prince does, but through an extolment of his gifts and skills as the foremost intrinsic value of his identity as an individual. As his omissions and veiled and oblique references to the episodes of violent and shameful subjugation suggest, Manzano's value as a human being should need no defense at all.

The *Autobiography* emphasizes Manzano's prodigious memory, the main instrument of his poetic ability since he has to compose without paper. After Manzano's first mistress, the Marchioness Justiz de Sta. Ana, who treated him like a son, dies, Manzano enters the service of the Marchioness of Prado Ameno with whom all of his suffering begins, as he is constantly punished for no apparent reason. On being forbidden to use his verbal gifts to recite to the other servants verses that he views as a product of his innocence, recitations that unleash the rage of his new mistress, Manzano defies the imposed silence by talking to himself. He eloquently describes this action in the following terms: "Because I lacked writing skills, in order to study what I was composing I used to talk to myself, making gestures and pretending emotions according to the nature of the composition. I would talk so much, that, just to talk, I would talk with the table, with the paintings, with the wall and I did not tell anyone what I was thinking" (41).

The constant reciting of verses and marvelous stories defies the silence imposed on the slave in an act of insubordination that culminates with the composition of his autobiography. The poetic process, understood as an act of creation of the subject, takes place in Manzano's account in the corpus of the writing in which he inscribes the particular traits of his circumstances within a modernity that erases such differences under the dictate of universal reason. Even if we agree that the moments of torture mark the development of the narration, no less important are the descriptions of Manzano's zealousness for acquiring letters, first through the memorization of verses and later through the acquisition of writing by copying the exercises of Don Nicolás, one of his masters, "so that I would get used to write the letters tracing them along the ones I had below and in this manner in less than a month I was able to write entire lines in my master's writing this is the reason why there is a certain identity between his writing and mine" (57).

That mimetic appropriation produces in the slave a doubleness that is painfully inscribed in the *Autobiography* through, on one hand, the tension between his assimilation into (and ultimate exclusion from) the colonial system and, on the other, between Manzano's own crisis regarding the acceptance of his position and his rebellion. That crisis of identity is transposed in the text through another type of mimesis,

as the written words themselves not only transcribe but also perform the constant flow of speech, accompanied by a multitude of gestures, as tactics that he needs to employ in order to continue "writing" verses under the close watch of his mistress. In his poetic compositions Manzano is able to inscribe a measured reflection of his sad condition by imitating a certain style. Quite differently, in the *Autobiography* the poet presents himself through the supposed transparency of writing that inscribes in its corpus the gestures of the body of the slave together with the marks and pain of torture, despite the narrator's reticence to describe such scenes in detail by using, among other techniques, the trope of the veil: "Oh God! Let us put a veil on the rest of this scene my blood has run I lost consciousness and when I came to I found myself in my mother's arms as she was shedding many tears" (52).

There is a stark contrast between the description, on one hand, of the episodes of learning that show the capacity of the young slave for education, and his ingeniousness in pursuing this vocation despite the prohibition to do so, and, on the other, of those scenes of torture, which the slave is unable to control or prevent. His knowledge of letters is sometimes used for entertaining his masters although such knowledge is also reason for punishment. Manzano could never come too close to the culture that subjugated him.[16] He publicly constructs himself as a writer, one that in the *Autobiography* ultimately performs in the writing itself the gesticulations through which he expresses himself after his poetic voice has been silenced. This mimesis of the body situates him between the semiotic assimilation of "a politics of fulfillment," which does not question occidental rationality, and "a politics of transfiguration," which looks to performance and dramatization as liberating practices. In Manzano's case that self-dramatization takes place through a language that, in the competing sanctioned and marginalized discourses in colonial Cuba, Antonio Vera-León has described as representing "barbaric" marks in the Creole face.[17] For Vera-León, Manzano's account presents his own story as well as the intellectual project of creating a national identity through an original "incorrect" language that embodies the tension between the canonical discourses of the metropolis and the identity models developed by the Creole intellectuals that portrayed blacks as others that do not represent a Cuban identity (Vera-León 14). Manzano's location in the interstices of this tension, not only between colony and metropolis but also within the global dimensions of slavery and the slave trade, have greatly influenced the reception of his text and the expectations regarding the expression of an autobiographical voice. When Manzano unveiled his "I," he did so in a fashion that is more typical of the urgency of the testimony of a witness than of an unencumbered self, liberated in the

act of writing. In his lucid study of the effects of both legal and literary discourses on the representation of the body of the slave, critic Julio Ramos's insistence on the study of Manzano's *Autobiography* as testimonial account uncovers another aspect of the narrative in relation to the legal discourse of the time, thus displacing the centrality of the elaboration of a coherent and original narrative of identity in the critical evaluation of the autobiography.

Manzano reminds Del Monte that he is a slave and as such a dead being to his master, calling attention to the division of his own body— reflected in the act of giving testimony itself— between the subject that he constructs as a witness and his status as an object, which negates such a position. Having escaped from his mistress, yet a slave when he writes his text, Manzano finds himself at an impasse produced by the precariousness of a situation in which slavery cannot be, as he expresses in a letter to Del Monte, but a locus of pain and shame (83-84). And yet, Manzano transcends the experience of slavery as a place of erasure as he re-vindicates the value of his testimony to authorize his own words in the space given to him by the judicial system in Cuba to denounce extreme abuses and mistreatment by the masters. His narrative focuses not only on the moments of torture but also on a detailed account of the events that led to such punishments. He does so with the purpose of proving, despite his claims to its impossibility, the erroneous accusations and severe punishments by his mistress for acts of unlawful appropriation that he did not commit. In this sense, Manzano's narrative echoes the hundreds of depositions made by slaves to the *Síndico de la Villa* (Town Syndic).[18] He is aware of the paradoxical situation in which he finds himself as a legal non-subject trying to establish himself as one by producing, as Ramos expresses, a discourse on his own body. This sentiment is clearly expressed in one of his letters: "I know that no matter how much I try to utter the truth, I will never be regarded as a perfect or respectable man but at least the sensible judgment of an impartial man will be able to establish the degree to which most men are concerned about the unhappy being that has had a few failings" (81). With this declaration to Del Monte, his avowed moral frailty notwithstanding, Manzano constitutes himself as a moral being that comes before a public audience to explain the circumstances that prompted him to transgress the law and escape from the abuses of a despotic and cruel mistress.

In claiming a testimonial voice with which he was familiar and that gives him a certain status as a subject, Manzano's narrative breaks out of the restrictions of an autobiographical model with its demands for the representation of a fully formed "I." By reverting to the testimonial and confessional models, with which Manzano was undoubtedly

familiar, the text, through its dramatic overtones, explodes the constraints of autobiography and defies the demands for a desirable coherence that the autobiographical mode exerts.[19] The *Autobiography* of Juan Francisco Manzano, textualized and so labeled for international consumption, is an embodiment of the social and historical conflicts of its time. It maintains a metaphorical relationship with a colony also trapped in the trauma of defining itself as an independent entity among the multiple divisions in the configuration of a national identity.

The History of Mary Prince: The Politics of Testifying

Nine years before the *Autobiography* of Juan Francisco Manzano was published in England, another transatlantic publication, *The History of Mary Prince* (1831), appeared in that country. A native of Bermuda, Mary Prince had come to England in 1828 with her owners, Mr. and Mrs. Wood. A few months after their arrival, Prince left their household because, in her own words, she could "stay no longer to be so used" (79).[20]

The purpose of *The History of Mary Prince* is clearly expressed in the opening paragraph of the Preface in which Thomas Pringle, the editor of Prince's text, states that it was Mary Prince who asked a friend of the Pringles to write her story so that "good people in England might hear from a slave what a slave had felt and suffered" (Prince 45).[21] By vowing to tell certain facts of her life as "a slave," Prince brings together the personal and the communal as she recounts the most salient episodes of her life in slavery in a direct appeal not only for the sympathy of the audience regarding her personal plight but also for a support of abolition. In the last paragraph of her narrative, Prince boldly refutes the assumptions of English people regarding the lives of slaves, assumptions that she forcefully declares are mostly based on the declarations of West Indian owners that "the slaves do not need better usage, and do not want to be free" (83).

Prince declares that these statements put a "cloak" on the truth regarding what slaves want and proceeds to refute such falsehoods, basing her argument on direct experience: "The man that says slaves be quite happy in slavery—that they don't want to be free—that man is either ignorant or lying person" (84). Claiming her authority as a witness who can speak for her fellow slaves, she ends her exposition with a direct call for solidarity and action in order to vanquish a system that permits the abuses and tortures of human beings that she has thereby denounced: "This is slavery. I tell it to let English people know the truth; and I hope they will never leave off to pray God, and call loud

to the great King of England, till all the poor blacks be given free, and slavery done up for evermore" (84).[22]

Although other slave narratives written in the United States are also vocal in their indictments of slavery as they expose the "truths" of this institution to audiences in the North, Prince's account, like Manzano's, is profoundly embedded in, and directly affected by, the international debate regarding the abolition of slavery in British colonies and its political, economic, and legal ramifications. Mary Prince is more than a fugitive slave; she is an exile, with her situation in England spelling out the peculiarities of the situation of colonialism that framed the production of Manzano's account. Prince's *History* embodies a displacement and a re-articulation. The act of telling underscores the specificity of the context in which the text was produced, and its mechanisms not only respond to but, more importantly, negotiate with that context.[23] In her study of the text, Sandra Pouchet-Paquet has argued that Prince's condition as an exile constitutes a place of resistance through which Prince's life story is linked "to the emergence of a new world in the Caribbean" (132). In this sense, just as Manzano's discourse prefigures an(other) language with which to give expression to a Cuban identity, Pouchet-Paquet makes the case that the transformation of Mary Prince's oral expression into a literary text "prefigures narrational aspects of primary autobiographical texts in modern Caribbean writing" (133).

As Moira Ferguson explains, Prince was called to act as a witness in a lawsuit that involved the veracity of her story. Contrary to Manzano's testimony, which exemplifies the voice of the slave produced in the interstices of the limited space provided to him by literary and legal discourses, Prince's testimony rests on the assuredness of the legal space provided to her in England where she could act in her own defense. In its inclusion of different annotations, such as footnotes, letters, testimonies and legal documents, *The History of Mary Prince,* according to Ferguson, resembles "the format of cases reported in the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, the press organ of the Anti-Slavery Society, of which Pringle was Secretary" (25). Thomas Pringle's Supplement to *The History of Mary Prince* explicitly mentions some of these cases as evidence that corroborates the "atrocities related in this narrative" (Prince 109). By upholding the testimony of slaves as of equal value to the authenticating testimonies of government officials, members of the Anti-Slavery Society, and "respectable" members of society in general, Pringle in turn acknowledged the power of Mary Prince to sanction the truth-value of her narrative, especially the first part which deals with her life in slavery in Bermuda and Turks Island before she travels to Antigua after being bought by Mr. Wood.

This first part of the narrative underscores the experiences of slavery under different masters and in different settings. After spending the first years of her life in Bermuda in relative happiness with Mrs. Williams, she is sold and separated from her mother and sisters after her mistress's death. Prince movingly communicates the distress of the moment when she and her sisters are going to be sold through the words of her mother who, as she dresses them for the auction, exclaims: "'See, I am *shrouding* my poor children; what a task for a mother!" (51). Beyond painfully capturing what the sale of her children means in terms of profoundly severing the family ties, together with the uncertain future that these children can expect, this image poignantly signifies the status of slaves as legally, and, thus, socially dead—"a dead being"—as Manzano pointedly expresses.[24] Situated at the juncture of social death and participation in society, the slave occupies a liminal position. However, even if Prince's speech has been somewhat mutilated by a transcriber who, according to Pringle, has eliminated significant grammatical mistakes, "so as to render it clearly intelligible" (45), the fact that she was called to act as a witness foregrounds her position as a subject. It is by appropriating the tenuous positions as subjects that are granted to them that both Prince's and Manzano's narratives negotiate a space of existence that challenges their subjugation through the articulation of an agency that brings that subjugation to the forefront.

In the household of Captain I__, [25] Prince is taught to do all kinds of work inside and outside the house, and is constantly whipped and beaten. Prince witnesses the horrible death of Hetty after Mr. and Mrs. I_ flog her repeatedly. After her death, Prince is made to perform all Hetty's duties and is herself constantly beaten. Prince remains in the service of Captain I__ over five years until he sends her to Turks Island to her new master, Mr. D__ who puts her to work in the salt ponds he owned. She spends ten years working in the ponds, in the forest or in the sea. After going back to Bermuda with Mr. D__, Prince takes leave of this "indecent master," who insists that she bathes him, declaring that this lewd behavior "was worse to me than all the licks" (68). She asks Mr. D__ to sell her to Mr. and Mrs. Wood, who were leaving for Antigua, where she had a desire to go. It was Mrs. Wood who finally acceded to purchase her when she found that she could work. That is why, when the Woods go to London, and Prince, due to her poor health, is unable to perform the excessive amount of work demanded of her, the Woods, especially Mrs. Wood, abuse her constantly and threaten her on numerous occasions with putting her out in the street, which, in the end, Prince declares, forced her to leave their household.

Contrary to the schematic description of her years before she moves to Antigua, Prince describes in great detail her life with the Woods in Antigua and then in London as part of a testimony that will help build her case further and support her petition for freedom. Yet her personal pursuit of freedom that culminates with her arrival in London is inextricably linked to the plights of all slaves as represented in her account of her travels through different places of bondage and torture in the West Indies. With her marriage to a free black man, Daniel James, and her affiliation with the Moravian church in Antigua, Prince portrays herself as a reliable and respectable witness and defendant. Although in some instances Prince talks about herself as a sinner, the nature of those sins is kept secret. Because she cannot confess publicly in church due to her shame, she will not confess either to the wider audience of her narrative or to her interlocutor. The admission of guilt contributes to her image as a Christian woman who appeals to the same Christian feelings of her readers. At the same time, the rhetoric of sentimentality is used sparsely in Prince's narration as she does not discuss, except for the passages where she relates the indecency of her master, issues that are specific to women slaves, such as children and sexuality.[26] Hence, far from helplessly surrendering herself to being a pawn in the abolitionist debate, Prince's powerful oratory defies the restrictions imposed on her testimony by asserting her knowledge not only of the facts learned through experience, but also of legal and economic issues as well as literary conventions. By admitting to sins that she will not disclose but denouncing what, by juxtaposition, are far greater sins of a modernity based on the enslavement of human beings and of a metropolis that creates the pretense of justice by not allowing slaves within its borders while not taking direct action in the colonies, Prince becomes the sole judge of her actions. Moreover, she does not refrain from passing scathing judgment on the behavior of English people in the West Indies and denouncing the hypocrisy of their opinion regarding slavery: "They tie up slaves like hogs—moor them up like cattle, and they lick them, so as hogs, or cattle, or horses never were flogged;—and yet they come home and say, and make some good people believe, that slaves don't want to get out of slavery" (83-84).

Prince admits she was willing to go to England to take care of the Woods's son for she was hoping to get cured of her rheumatism; besides both she and her husband harbored the illusion that her master might free her once in England. But, as Prince herself reflects, such illusions were not fulfilled when the Woods refused to free her, even as some members of the Anti-Slavery Society offered to buy her. After leaving the Woods's household with the assistance of Moravian Missionaries and some acquaintances, she seeks the help of the Anti-Slavery Society.

She soon finds out that the laws of England did not grant her freedom in the colonies, and so she becomes an exile in England when the Woods return to Antigua without her.

Despite Pringle's claim in the Preface that the Anti-Slavery Society is not involved in any way in the publication of the narrative or in its content, the legal diatribes exposed in the Supplement showcase Prince's particular circumstances as a perfect example of the precarious situation of slaves upon arriving to the shores of England. Appendix One, in the Supplement, includes the petition of Mary Prince to Parliament presented on June 24, 1829 in which she asks for a consideration of the particular matters of her case regarding the requests to her master to sell her, so that she can return to the West Indies as a free woman. Pringle observes that it was Mr. Wood's "unreasonable conduct" that prompted the Anti-Slavery Society to bring the above petition to Parliament, which was presented by Dr. Lushington who also, as Pringle explains, indicated "his intention to bring in a Bill to provide for the entire emancipation of all slaves brought to England with the owner's consent" (88). Pringle ends his "Supplement to *The History of Mary Prince*" by exhorting the Government to introduce a Bill that would grant the slave complete freedom once in England and, following the spirit of Prince's closing remarks he proclaims "THAT NO SLAVE CAN EXIST WITHIN THE SHORES OF GREAT BRITAIN" (115).

The particulars that come out of the arguments offered by Mr. Wood, together with the ensuing refutation by Pringle, based on the proof of logic and reason, underscore the fact that not only Prince's character and credibility are under scrutiny but also the different voices coming from the abolitionist and pro-slavery camps. The endless cycle of references provided by footnotes and letters and eyewitness accounts that are sustained by yet other accounts, constructs a discourse that not only cannot function as an authoritative apparatus but one that also points to the elusiveness of an absolute legitimating discourse.

Yet, even as Mario Cesáreo, agreeing with the general critical consensus, argues that in order to be constructed as a legitimate subject Mary Prince has to imitate another's discourse, another's gestures, this imitation process subverts the appropriation of the Other by claiming a performative space through the illocutionary moment of her testimony, effectively negotiating a place between and betwixt erasure and participation in society.[27] With her emphasis on the economic dimension of slavery and the concealment of other aspects of her life, Prince underscores the testimonial dimension of her narration as she produces a narrative that, according to Cesáreo, takes advantage of the aesthetics of abolitionism as "an act of political praxis" (120). Such a political function allows for a different evaluation of oral narratives to

faithfully inscribe an independent subject and destabilizes an absolute conception of autobiography as the ultimate space for marginalized subjectivities to contest an appropriation of the self that has to conform to the aesthetics of the center. In this regard, *The History of Mary Prince* unites the form of the slave narrative with the epistemological concerns of testimonial accounts while precisely locating the experience of the testifying subject within the perimeters of modernity.

The organizing points of Manzano's narrative oscillate between the moments of torture that showed the despotic nature of his mistress, justifying his need to escape, and the description of his rhetorical skills. By contrast, the recurrent theme in Mary Prince's account is the insistence on the value of her labor, and the unjust punishments when she cannot meet the unreasonable demands imposed on her.[28] Thus, consistent with Paul Gilroy's argument, Prince's account of the institution of slavery does not represent "a site of black victimage" since it does not manage to silence her. Prince calls attention to the value of the work force of the slave population and the rights that correspond to them as workers, thus subverting the parameters that measure her worth as a slave woman in terms of her reproductive capacity to define herself as a subject that vies for control of her body and labor.

The annotations to *The History of Mary Prince* establish a continuum between the text and the body of the slave, claiming an authority to interpret both that is constantly challenged by Prince's rhetoric. The "Appendix to the third edition," included in the Supplement, presents a letter from Mrs. Pringle to one of the secretaries of the "Birmingham Ladies' Society for Relief of Negro Slaves" in which Mrs. Pringle attests to the origins of the scars on Mary Prince's body "occasioned by the various cruel punishments she has mentioned or referred to in her narrative" (119-20). Despite the physical evidence provided by the marks on her body, Prince is the only one who can truly explain them as Mrs. Pringle remits back to the facts of Prince's testimony, whose truth Mrs. Pringle ascertains based not on some irrefutable tangible proof but on its "uniform veracity," that is, on a plausibility of the events told, on a coherence of the narration for which, ultimately, only Prince can be responsible. As a result, these different cross-examinations do not determine Mary Prince's identity as an object, as an "other" to herself, but rather they assert her position as a subject.[29]

As I pointed out in my analysis of Manzano's *Autobiography*, the conspicuous absences or gaps in the discourse or the narration itself do not constitute so much a lack but instead the expression of an otherwise impossible subjectivity that cannot exist within the imposed parameters of being. The moment of translating the oral into writing marks both for Manzano and Prince their inscription in a system that

is intent on obliterating their agency as it depends on a slave economy for its subsistence. However, Prince's agency is carried out through a series of gestures that mask, or deflect, a deeper scrutiny of her life, turning that examination on the colonial system itself. Thus, Prince's testimony constitutes a performative act through which she engages in a politics of transfiguration by refusing to "play occidental rationality at its own game" (Gilroy 39).

Both Manzano's and Prince's texts share an epistemological discourse based on a process of translation, such as from oral to written, from the periphery to the metropolis, from a language or mode of expression to another, and from non-being to being. This translation ultimately places them in continuously shifting positions in texts that are constantly fragmented and resist any unifying resolution. Such translation, or translatability, lies at the core of the experiences narrated by the slaves, but in these particular texts it marks the impossibility of narrating a totalizing experience. In the case of Manzano, his autobiography, far from representing the culmination of a process of self-creation through what Gilroy calls the "aesthetics of personalism," discovers the crisis of a modern self whose dreams are constantly deferred and whose writing ultimately embodies the inner division of a subject that cannot reconcile his double modern self. Mary Prince's testimonial performance goes beyond the *poesis*, or act of self-creation, implied in the autobiographical act as it signals the impossibility of offering a full disclosure of a self that is, otherwise, subsumed under the dictates of an economic and legal discourse against which it demands political action.

Notes

1. Gilroy 36.

2. Ibid, 36.

3. In *To Tell a Free Story*, William Andrews explains this liminality in terms of the lingering limbo in which the fugitive slave finds her or himself (179).

4. Despite their denunciation of the ills of the system, Del Monte and his followers advocated a gradual abolition of slavery, reflecting the general fear that existed on the island that the blacks, once liberated, would cause an uprising.

5. In his Introduction to the bilingual edition of the *Autobiography*, Iván Schulman explains that the colonial period's racial and social prejudices, the illiteracy of the slaves and their fear of being punished, together with the writer's fear of censorship and a lack of interest in preserving oral stories, are among the main reasons for the scarcity of narratives in Latin America compared to the United States (7).

6. In her narrative Mary Prince appropriates, and subverts, England's moral authority by focusing on the economic contributions of slaves to the British Empire.

7. In his analysis of the multiple revisions of the manuscript both in Spanish and in English, William Luis observes that Manzano's uncertainties and sometimes confusing references were played down in Madden's text and that the latter "rearranged events to make Manzano's case clearer to coincide not with Manzano's reality but with his own abolitionist ideas" (98). Luis published a critical edition in 2007 of Suárez y Romero's version of the autobiography.

8. Guirao 123.

9. Calcagno 77.

10. Ibid, 62.

11. Friol 47.

12. Commenting on different evaluations of Manzano's text, Vera Kutzinski has remarked: "It is not that Manzano's writings lack racial awareness, only that they do not celebrate racial difference in ways that some critics tend to expect of all black writers, quite regardless of their specific and varied historical circumstances" (83).

13. Susan Willis pointedly calls attention to the necessity of establishing other parameters under which to judge the supposed lack of coherence and meaning of the text. She concludes that it would be more productive to study the narrative as "a series of discontinuous events, each of which is a crystallized moment of torture" (208).

14. All translations are mine, unless otherwise noted, from the edition by José Luciano Franco.

15. Molloy 52.

16. After Manzano gained his freedom, he worked in Havana in different jobs. He contributed to some literary magazines and in 1841 he wrote the play *Zafira*. He was suspected of participating in the Conspiracy of La Escalera in 1844 and put in jail until his release in 1845. Del Monte was also accused of being involved in this conspiracy and had to leave the country. Another slave, the poet Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés, better known as "Plácido," who also belonged to the Del Monte circle, was found guilty and executed. After this episode Manzano never published again.

17. Vera-León 22.

18. El Síndico de la Villa presented the complaints of the slaves in court. The Spanish legal code considered the slaves as being under age regarding judicial matters. It granted them the right to denounce undue violent behavior on the part of the masters. It also demanded that the masters gave the slaves religious instruction.

19. Cuban historian, Gloria García Rodríguez, has selected some of these depositions to present the first-hand testimony of slaves collected in a volume that focuses on the vision of slavery from the point of view of the slaves.

20.In her Introduction to *The History of Mary Prince*, Moira Ferguson points out that Mary Prince "became the first black British spokeswoman for general emancipation" (22).

21. In the appendix to the third edition the friend of the Pringles who took down Prince's story is identified as Susana Strickland, who in the letter included in that appendix testifies to the presence of certain marks on Mary Prince's body.

22.In his Introduction to a volume of women slaves' narratives, William Andrews underscores the importance of these remarks as they claim the right of a black woman to speak for "all black people" about the slaves' point of view regarding the "morality of slavery" (xxxiv).

23.Only two years after the publication of *The History of Mary Prince*, Britain passed the Emancipation Bill, ten years after its introduction in 1823.

24.The precariousness of such a condition has been described by Orlando Paterson in his work *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (1982).

25.In the Preface, Pringle explains that the names of Captain I and of Mr. D are the only ones that have not been fully given. Scholars have identified Captain I as Captain John Ingham.

26.In an illuminating study of *The History of Mary Prince* that examines the politics and poetics of the contact zone, Mario Cesáreo observes that in its restricted use of the aesthetics of sentimentality, the text highlights the degradation of human beings for economic gain (119).

27.Cesáreo 124.

28.When she is twelve Mrs. Williams hires her out to Mrs. Pruden and in her household she learns the alphabet and to spell "small words" with Miss Fanny who, after reciting her lesson to her grandmother, would ask Prince to repeat them for her (49).

29.For Mario Cesáreo, there is nothing "missing" from Prince's narrative. According to him, she affirms her agency as a speaking subject precisely because of "the overdetermination of the spoken by the symbolic economy within which that discourse is made to operate" (126).

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About the Author

Nereida Segura-Rico, a native of Spain, specializes in comparative literature of the Americas, with an interest in African-American and Afro-Hispanic literature. Her areas of research are testimonial writing; Caribbean literature; Latino/a literature in the U.S.; and the politics of memory. She is an Associate Professor of Spanish in the Division of Humanities at The College of New Rochelle in New Rochelle, New York.

And We Were All Alive. By Olvido García Valdés. Trans. Catherine Hammond. Bloomington, IN: Cardboard House Press, 2016. 164 pp. $17.00 (paper)

Olvido García Valdés (b. Spain 1950) is one of the most revered names in contemporary Spanish literature. The poetic craft of García Valdés is critically acclaimed for its avant-gardism, which won her the Spanish National Poetry Prize in 2007 for her book *Y todos estábamos vivos* (Tusquests, 2006). Catherine Hammond's compelling translation into English of this magnificent collection of poetry appeared about a year ago in the United States, published by the Cardboard House Press (CHP) as *And We Were All Alive*. García Valdés's poetic expression is highly emotional, absolutely beautiful, and formally very complex, which makes the joint endeavor between Hammond and CHP to bring García Valdés's work into a bilingual Spanish/English translation a risky and laudable initiative.

García Valdés's creativity manifests itself in an anti-hierarchical, juxtaposed, paratactic language, which has been formally articulated in suspension, violent breaks, hyperbaton, and ellipsis, producing an aesthetic effect that has been defined as a kind of anti-form (Marcos Canteli, *Del parpadeo* 127). The poems lack titles and sometimes begin with a word in bold lowercase, giving the impression of an open continuity within the thematic organization of the book. Not surprisingly, García Valdés became the voice of *extrañeza* (strangeness), a contemporary movement within Spanish poetics that seeks to defamiliarize reality by paying a close, loving attention to the everyday. For García Valdés, poetic strangeness is *felt* in the reading experience and constitutes the product of the intensified perception of a conscious body facing the world, as she reveals when talking about her own poetics. Indeed, affect plays a crucial role in García Valdés's creative process, her poetic style being characterized by a highly emotional tone, the origin of which seems impossible to determine. Like in the play of the chicken and the egg, in the poetry of García Valdés we can't truly ascertain if emotion is the result of poetic craft or if this craft is the consequence of a previously felt emotional experience skillfully expressed in poetic form. However, what appears undoubtedly clear to her reader is that the affective mechanism at stake in the reading experience not only transforms the way we think about poetic language in the new millennium, but disrupts the normative contours of the bounded body in its relationship to others, including nonhuman others. As we progress through the pages of *And We Were All Alive* we discover vivid

references to the natural world in front of which the poet articulates moving experiences of living and dying. Tellingly, the collection opens with a beautiful poem on the myth of Persephone, the Queen of the Underworld in Greek mythology, who contemplates undaunted the processes of natural decay and renewal while feeling in the heart "how blood / pulses through the ear" (11).

The CHP is a small, sustainable press that was initially formed in Bloomington, Indiana with the idea of creating a publishing house that featured English translations of literary works originally written in Spanish. The first CHP publication was a collection of Peruvian poetry titled *Asymmetries* in 2014. CHP's editorial endeavors are now expanding from poetry into narrative fiction, with a series of short story collections that feature contemporary fiction authors from a single country, with Cuba as the first such project. For her part, Hammond is a well-known translator of poetry written in Spanish and an accomplished poet in her own right. Her translation of García Valdés's work follows the structure of the original divided into three sections —"Places," "Not for Self," and "Shadow to Shadow"— and includes a useful note at the end of the book titled "A Day with Olvido García Valdés" in which Hammond recalls an informative encounter with the poet. In this note, Hammond provides valuable clues on how she tackled the challenges posed by a collection of poetry that underscores gaps, fragmentation, juxtaposition and suppression of narrative elements. On this point, she explains that her first task was to maintain the linguistic variation of the original work "without losing sense that meaning itself is unstable" (150). Consequently, Hammond upholds the formal and semantic ambiguities that feature in García Valdés's poetry through a masterful reworking of linguistic, conceptual, and cultural elements. The result is thoroughly satisfying. For example, in a stunningly beautiful poem included in this collection, the speaker carefully observes a fig tree about to bloom, defamiliarizing the initial object of attention by claiming that the branches of the tree seem "vine shoots of bright silver / with green cat's claw" (59). Hammond captures the sober severity of García Valdés's lyric strangeness in the lines that conclude the poem: "Intensity / from what does not belong, as if / there were nothing between me and suitability, / between goodness or beauty and life" (59).

Sometimes, an important gist in the original text gets unavoidably lost in the translation. However, as Hammond herself points out, the value of a bilingual edition solves the problem by allowing the informed reader to discover the lost meaning (153). For instance, a distinctive element of García Valdés's avant-gardism is the use of a syntactic compound (not unusual in colloquial Spanish) of the neutral article *lo* followed by an adjective, as in *lo solo* or *lo cálido* (that which feels/re-

mains alone/warm), in order to express an existential quality of being. However, the English translation loses the minimalism characteristic of the Spanish expression. In cases like this one, Hammond remains loyal to the minimalist style of García Valdés by eliding the verb in the translation, keeping just the adjective in the phrase. Thus, "lo solo del animal" (loosely, "that which feels/remains alone in the animal") becomes in Hammond's translation "the animal alone" (131), a line that keeps the uncluttered, naked brilliance of the original sentence.

Notwithstanding the critical value of a bilingual edition of poetry, the side-by-side of the original Spanish and the English translation still poses unavoidable difficulties for readers competent in the two linguistic codes. That is, confronted with the original version of the poetic text, the competent reader will have to decide between three kinds of readings: the original, the translated, and the comparative, as Mexican poet and translator Marco Antonio Campos has aptly noted in his essay "Poesía y traducción" (poetry and translation) (60). However, more often than not, the three options do not fit neatly with one another. Here is where Hammond's skills as a poet come in handy. Her translations stay believable to García Valdés's poetic diction even while radically altering the literal meaning of the original poem. It could be said that, in this sense, Hammond follows Walter Benjamin's famous dictum that the task of the translator would be to find in the target language the intended effect that produces in it "the echo of the original."

One specific example of this type of literal alteration of the original can be found in "[Olive trees pulled out by the roots]," a strange, unsettling poem included in "Places." This text involves a visual impression of some very old olive trees brutally uprooted that the speaker seems to have encountered while driving on the highway, and becomes, in this case, paradigmatic. In this specific poem, Hammond transforms the original "Olivos . . . viajeros" (Olive trees . . . travelers) for "branches . . . scattered," "irreal la simetría" (unreal symmetry) for "symmetry too real," "impropia / de ancianos nudosos" (inadequate / of knotted old folk) for "perverse with ancient / gnarls," and, finally, "Retengo / el coche en paralelo" (I pull over in parallel) becomes "I pull myself / back on track" (12-13). These not so subtle variations in the translation of the original text are evident for the competent reader. However, the creativity of Hammond's compositions still maintain the original strangeness of the valdesian creative project; that is, the "echo of the original" in Benjamin's fitting understanding of the task of the translator, and, most important, allow the non-native speaker of Spanish to enter into the magic and intriguing complexity of García Valdes's poetic diction. Therefore, this volume will be useful not only for the specialist in translation studies or contemporary Spanish poetry but, no doubt, for lovers

of good poetry written in English as well. As readers and teachers of poetry we can all be very excited about the availability of this translation into English of the work Olvido García Valdés, a name that has already entered the shelves of 21st century Spanish cultural history.

Enrique Álvarez
Enrique Álvarez is an Associate Professor of Spanish at Florida State University, where he teaches courses on Spanish and Spanish American literature and cultural studies. He is a specialist in 20th and 21st century Spanish peninsular poetry with a focus on gender and sexuality, LGTBQ culture, and critical theory.

Uncanny Encounters. Literature, Psychoanalysis, and the End of Alterity. By John Zilcosky. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2016. xv + 264 pp. $27.95 (paper).

German colonial history is marked by its late arrival/participation in the European battle for territories, by its violence against native inhabitants in the occupied lands, and by its mystification of the exotic Other. The latter culminated in the cultural production of the imagined noble savage—for example in Karl May's works. At the turn of the century, European colonialism peaked in the "scientific" subjugation of new territories through the act of colonial mapping: between 1890 and 1914 the cartographic conquest of Africa or South America creates maps that are in some areas almost as detailed as today's Google Earth. However, these foreign spaces that were supposed to contain the absolute Other (i.e. alterity) revealed an uncanny familiarity when European (and especially German) explorers and travelers entered them. Even in the Earth's most remote places Germans did not meet the "primitive savage" but instead fellow Europeans who had arrived a few years earlier and made the foreign place their own, or natives that had assimilated Western habits, languages, and customs. The shock of this surprising encounter, according to John Zilcosky's argument, led ultimately to the development of a new form of violence, not directed against difference, but against the "dread of uncanny recognition" (13). Reading popular German travel texts of the fin-de-siècle and canonical modernist literature (Hesse, Mann, Hofmannsthal, Musil), Zilcosky discovers that Freud's psychoanalytical writings, particularly his theories of the Uncanny, might be better equipped to serve as analytical tools for comprehending the subtexts of German colonial writings than postcolonial theories (e.g., E. Said, H. Bhabha), precisely because

Germans traveling to unfamiliar places discovered not the absolute Other but the all-too-familiar.

Zilcosky's well-researched and convincingly argued monograph looks at the historical roots of a political and social violence that is not triggered by the fear of the stranger's difference but by his/her uncanny similarity. Ultimately, this process of the stranger's assimilation to one's own culture created Germany's uncanny *Doppelgänger*, namely the European Jews who became indistinguishable from the average middle-class Germans. Zilcosky sees Anti-Semitic racial ideology, institutionalized racism, and the final eradication of similarity—the murder of six million Jews—grounded in the Nazi's fear that markers of identity might get lost in modern societies. How did Zilcosky arrive at this provocative conclusion? Comparing popular German travel and adventure literature (e.g., Norbert Jacques's *Hot Land*; Waldemar Bonsels' *Indienfahrt*) with travel journals by Expressionist artists (Nolde, Pechstein) and the prose of modernist writers (Jünger, Kafka, Hesse), he discovers a common thread in the portrayal of German encounters with natives: male Germans in the jungle come too close to the imagined savage by reproducing his/her "primitive" acts: the so-called *Tropenkoller* (tropical rage) which translates into phallic unbound sexuality, brutal violence, mental instability. The actual meetings with the natives, however, reveal their similarity and evoke disgust in the German travelers, culminating in their violence against *Mischlinge* (people of mixed races), those "half-Germans" who mimic the Westerners and provoke them by holding up a distorted mirror image of themselves. These uncanny encounters, according to Zilcosky, leave the travelers with the "trauma of globalizations' foreign-familiarity" (74), which resists aesthetic sublimation. Rather than leaving the experience of shock in the isolation of the foreign territory, the "dark continent" entered the European psyche. On one hand, Freud discovers the uncanny happenstance with the Other as part of modern subjectivity ("primitive" sexuality, the Id, the unconscious); however, psychoanalytical inquiry is ultimately unable to answer the question of the origin of the uncanny. On the other hand, modernist literature (Th. Mann, Hofmannsthal, and Musil) reproduces the uncanny encounter with the foreign-familiar by placing the exotic at the assumed margins of European society. In these texts, which Zilcosky reads as "modernist ethnographies," the jungle had come to Europe, be it in Mann's Venice (*Death in Venice*), Hofmannsthal's Carinthia (*Andreas*) or Musil's Tyrol (*Grigia*). "Exotic" places populated with "strange" people so close to home trigger an uncanny anxiety when the ethnographic eye comes too close to its object: Like the anthropologist and psychoanalyst, the narrators of these modernist texts are also trapped when position-

ing themselves in the mind of the native or neurotic. The modernist proximity to the exotic and yet similar Other (e.g., the foreign-familiar "natives" in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as well as the migrants in Berlin or Vienna) evokes an aggressive resistance that articulates itself in the construction of an identity that desperately insists on difference. Zilcosky is quite convincing in linking the uncanny moment of self/other recognition/disavowal to racial ideology and the challenges of today's multicultural societies.

What makes Zilcosky's monograph such a fascinating and thought-provoking read is its author's broad knowledge of the intellectual discourses that shaped the post-colonial discussion, his keen ability for close readings of primary sources in their historical context, and his theoretical courage to question long-standing assumptions in cultural history. Interweaving his interpretation of canonical texts and *Trivialliteratur* with broad theoretical concepts (Bhabha, Derrida, Freud, Lacan, Žižek), Zilcosky demonstrates the importance of psycho-historical research in times of global identity conflicts. This monograph is an important contribution to post-colonial theory, discussions concerning German identity, and contemporary issues in multicultural societies.

Stephan K. Schindler
Stephan K. Schindler is Professor of German Studies and Chair of the Department of World Languages at the University of South Florida in Tampa. He has published on German cultural and literary history, Goethezeit, German film, Holocaust, and German pop culture.