CAIRO STUDIES IN ENGLISH

CROSSING AMERICAN BORDERS

Editors
Hoda Gindi, Mona I. Ali, Nadia El Kholy

Editorial Assistant
Amira Fawzi

The Department of English Language and Literature
The Faculty of Arts, Cairo University

2020 (2)
Cairo Studies in English (CSE) is a double-blind peer-reviewed journal of research in literature, linguistics and translation studies, issued by the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University.
(ISSN: 0575-1624; E-ISSN: 2682-2504)

Chief Editor: Hala Kamal.
Advisory Board: Susan Bassnett, Uma Chaudhuri, Hoda Gindi, Salwa Kamel, Mahmoud Ali Qudah, Galila-Ann Ragheb, John Carlos Rowe, Fatima Sadiqi, Robert Young.

Reviewers involved in this issue:

Online:
https://cse.journals.ekb.eg/
http://edcu.edu.eg/publications/cairo-studies-in-english/

Contact: Cairo Studies in English Editorial Board, Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University, 12613 Orman, Giza, Cairo, Egypt.
cairostudies@edcu.edu.eg
edcu.edu.eg

EDCU website publishing: Mohamed Abdel-Aaty.
Cover design: Hala Kamal.
Printed at: Cairo University Press.

Disclaimer: Securing permissions for copyrighted material is the authors’ responsibility.
Copyright©2020(2)
Department of English Language & Literature, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University.
CONTENTS

Editorial
Hoda Gindi, Mona I. Ali, Nadia El Kholy

Exploring the Metabolic Rift: An Eco-Marxist Reading of Sam Shepard’s *The God of Hell*
*Amal Ibrahim Kamel*

Identity Negotiation through Positioning in Two Selected Short Stories from Darraj’s *The Inheritance of Exile*
*Dalia Hamid*

*In the Blood*: A Contemporary American Common (Wo)man Tragedy
*Dina Amin*

Emotion as a Border: A Reading of NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*
*Fadwa Mahmoud Hassan Gad*

They’re Just Like Everybody Else: A Postcolonial Reading of Rohina Malik’s *Yasmina’s Necklace*
*Ingy Hassan*

Indian-American Identity Negotiation: Placing the Self in Domestic and Public Spaces
*Marwa Fawzy*

(Un)Leash the Self: Exploring Frontiers in (Re)writing America
*Reem Eldegwi*

Haiku as a Transcultural Genre: Trajectories of Crisscrossing Japanese-American Borders
*Saeed Gazar*

Performance Poetry as a Performative Act: A Close Listening to Andrea Gibson’s Poetry
*Sahar Elmougy*
Emerging Voices:
Crossing Borders in Uniform: The Construction of Subjectivity in a Post 9/11 Blogosphere
Fatima-al-zahraa Ahmad Ramy 174

Life-Writing and Autofiction in Radwa Ashour’s The Journey
Fatma Massoud 193

The Transnational Self across Borders: A Comparative Study of Kiran Desai and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie
Nada Ghazy 214

Crossing American Borders: Reclaiming Palestinian National and Cultural Identities in Ibrahim Fawal’s On the Hills of God
Nagwa Ibrahim Dawoud 236

Book Reviews:
Marta Caminero-Santangelo, Documenting the Undocumented
Sonia Farid 264
EDITORIAL

Crossing American Borders

This issue of *Cairo Studies in English (CSE)* entitled “Crossing American Borders” includes some articles that were presented at the 14th International Symposium on Comparative Literature held by the Department of English Language and Literature in 2018 which had as its theme “Writing Across Borders”. Some of the papers in this issue were presented during that symposium, while others have been written specifically for the issue. In addition, the volume has a special section dedicated to “Emerging Voices” that includes chapters from MA or PhD dissertations that are considered eligible for publication, before the defence of the theses. All the papers fall within the domain of American Studies but deal with topics such as: immigration, migration, exile, diaspora, transnationalism and hyphenated identities.

A few papers deal with problems faced by immigrants in America particularly, the question of identity such as in Marwa Fawzy’s paper, “Indian-American Identity Negotiation: Placing the Self in Domestic and Public Spaces”. In this paper the concept of a hyphenated identity emerges from the character’s past in the homeland combined with its present in the host land, America. This diasporic experience is analyzed using Ajit K. Maan’s model of in “Internarrative Identity” in Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* and Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*.

In “(Un)Leash the Self: Exploring Frontiers in (Re)writing America”, Reem El Degwi, through an analysis of Julia Alvarez’s *How the García Girls Lost their Accents* and Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street*, contends that the protagonists of the two literary works manage their hyphenated identities and overcome problems pertaining to “American exceptionalism”, a term that is extensively discussed in the paper. The writer also alludes to the transnational dimension of literature, specifically American literature.

Dalia Hamed in her paper “Identity Negotiation through Positioning in two Selected Short Stories from Darraj’s *The Inheritance of Exile*” applies positioning theory and discourse analysis theories to Darraj’s collection of short stories. Through the use of the above-mentioned theories Hamed demonstrates how characters in the stories negotiate their hyphenated identities as Arab Americans. Further, the author aims at showing the different ways first generation and second generation Arab Americans perceive the two components of their hyphenated identities.
Ingy Hassan’s “They’re Just Like Everybody Else: A Postcolonial Reading of Rohina Malik’s *Yasmina’s Necklace*” is, as indicated in the title, a postcolonial reading of the Pakistani writer Rohina Malik’s play, *Yasmina’s Necklace*, based on Edward Said’s and W. E. B. Du Bois’ approaches to the stereotyping of Muslims and Arabs in the post 9/11 era in the United States. The paper also makes use of Foucault’s theory dealing with the relationship of knowledge to power. The different attitudes of the Arab and Muslim characters in the play regarding their stereotyping is explained in the light of the above theories, emphasizing the fact that stereotyping contributes to creating a double-consciousness on the part of its victims who tend to see themselves from the colonizer’s point of view as well as that of their own as colonized.

In her paper, “Emotion as a Border: A Reading of NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*”, Fadwa Mahmoud Hassan Gad discusses Bulawayo’s work in the light of three theories: namely, Sara Ahmed’s macro approach to the phenomenon of borders based on hate and fear as boundaries; Gloria Anzaldúa’s micro analysis of the border crossing as a condition that entails mixed emotions, and Victor Konrad’s theory of mobility that involves processes of debordering/rebordering. The paper focuses on the emotions of hate, fear and anger as the main motivations for action in the case of the diasporic existence of Africans in America in the post 9/11 era.

A couple of papers deal with crossing borders of literary genres, for instance Saeed Gazar in his paper “Haiku as a Transcultural Genre: Trajectories of Crisscrossing Japanese-American Borders” analyzes some of the haikus of major Japanese poets and others by American poets from the Beat Generation to show how some of the haiku’s qualities such as alterity, *shasei* and free association have enabled it to cross cultural borders not only in the United States of America but in many parts of the world, including the Arab World.

Similarly, “*In the Blood*: A Contemporary American Common (Wo)man Tragedy”, Dina Amin discusses the way the play crosses the borders of the Aristotelian tragedy to present the protagonist as an African-American woman. Amin asserts that Lori-Parks manages to use the elements of classic tragedy in her play to portray the plight of this poor African-American woman who defies any attempt at stereotyping her.

Sahar Elmougy’s paper, “Performance Poetry as a Performative Act: A Close Listening to Andrea Gibson’s Poetry”, is a study of the way performance poetry crosses different social and political borders through challenging mainstream cultural constructs. An analysis of two performance poems by Andrea Gibson reveals the anti-authoritarian and subversive power of performance poetry. The
paper also lives up to its objective of giving voice to the marginalized by subverting the language itself to match the gender identity of the poet.

An interdisciplinary study by Amal Ibrahim Kamel under the title: “Exploring the Metabolic Rift: An Eco-Marxist Reading of Sam Shepard’s The God of Hell” discusses the concept of the human being as a component of nature, not as a separate entity. An eco-Marxist approach is used to analyze the different elements of the play including characters, dialogue, non-verbal communication, stage directions, lighting, and setting.

In addition to the above papers, there are four papers by “emerging voices”, two of which are concerned with crossing borders through life-writing and the other two with the question of identity. Fatma Massoud in her paper, “Life-Writing and Autofiction in Radwa Ashour’s The Journey” analyzes Ashour’s academic journey, as a Ph.D. student, from Egypt to America. The writer shows how the book crosses borders not only between nations and cultures but also between genres including autobiography, autofiction and travel writing.

Fatima Ramy’s paper, “Crossing Borders in Uniform: The Construction of Subjectivity in a Post 9/11 Blogosphere” focusses on the diaries of soldiers who fought in the Middle East. Ramy through the perspectives of these soldiers, presents an alternative narrative of the war, from that of the politicians and the mainstream media.

Nada Ghazi’s “The Transnational Self across Borders: A Comparative Study of Kiran Desai and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie” asserts that both Kiran Desai’s The Inheritance of Loss and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Americanah manage to adopt a flexible attitude towards migration that challenges nationalist essentialism. The comparison in the two works proves that the two writers are in favour of a hybridized identity that manages to transcend the national to a transnational existence.

Nagwa Ibrahim Dawoud in her paper: “Crossing American Borders, Reclaiming Palestinian National and Cultural Identity in Ibrahim Fawal’s On the Hills of God”. attempts to deconstruct the colonial discourse of the Israeli occupation concerning the Palestinian national and cultural identity. The paper, also touches upon issues related to crossing both geographical and psychological borders of America, a land of exile.

This volume also includes a review, written by Sonia Farid, of Marta Caminero-Santangelo’s important book, Documenting the Undocumented: Latino/a Narratives and Social Justice in the Era of Operation Gatekeeper (2016). The book includes a collection of both fictional and non-fictional experiences of crossing the American border by Mexican and Caribbean
immigrants in the era of Operation Gatekeeper as is stated in the subtitle of the book. According to Farid, the book manages to present different aspects of those experiences, including trauma and testimonies, which are not only used for the purpose of documentation, but also for empowering these immigrants as well, through giving them a voice and letting their suffering be known to the world.

***

The editors of this issue would like to express their gratitude to the reviewers for their time and effort. We wish to express our special thanks to Amira Fawzi for her assistance in the editorial process. Thanks are also due to Dalia Youssef and Fatima-al-zahraa Ahmad Ramy for their final copy-editing of this issue. Finally, profound gratitude goes to Hala Kamal, editor in chief of *Cairo Studies in English*, for her constant support.

Hoda Gindi, Mona I. Ali, Nadia El K holy
*Cairo Studies in English* 2020(2)
Exploring the Metabolic Rift: An Eco-Marxist Reading of Sam Shepard’s *The God of Hell*

*Amal Ibrahim Kamel*

One of the negative aspects of modern technology is the fact that we live in an age of environmental crises, resulting from man’s eco-unfriendly practices that damage the livelihood on our planet. Grave ecological disasters such as shortage of drinking water or food supply, climate change, deforestation, depletion of natural resources, the extinction of some birds or animal species, global warming phenomenon, loss of biodiversity, contamination…etc. have become a major threat to man’s life and well-being on earth. Ecocriticism is a movement that has started developing in the 1990s as a reaction to man’s attitude to nature, highlighting frequent ecological disasters confronting the globe. As an interdisciplinary approach, ecocriticism is enriched by other fields of knowledge such as history, geography, environmental science, political science etc. It focuses on the dynamic relationship between man and nature in literary texts.

According to William Rueckert (1978), (who first coined the term) in his seminal work, “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism”, ecocriticism applies the ecological principles to the study of literature. According to Lawrence Buell, ecocriticism is “the study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist’s praxis” (Buell 1995, 430).

As a term, eco-theatre refers to the intersection of ecology and performance. It aims at drawing the public’s attention to the issues related to the environmental preoccupations as well as suggesting ways of conciliation between the human and the physical world. Being interpreted in a variety of ways since its publication in 2004, *The God of Hell* is treated as an outstanding text in Shepard’s dramatic oeuvre. It has been frequently discussed as a political comment on the U.S. war in Iraq or Bush’s war on terror. In her “There’s Hell to Pay in Sam Shepard’s Latest Play”, Elysa Gardner praises the play as “pungent and poignant” and as “a powerful indictment of how our conduct toward prisoners abroad was influencing government behavior at home”

* Associate Professor of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, Fayoum University.

*Cairo Studies in English – 2020(2): https://cse.journals.ekb.eg/*
Exploring the Metabolic Rift

(Gardner 2004, 244). One of the previous reviews of the play entitled, “Effacing Myths and Mystification of Power: Sam Shepard’s *The God of Hell*”, written by Boróka Prohaszka Rad (2009), focuses on a reading of the play in the conceptual framework of Victor Turner’s theories on ritual and liminality and Michel Foucault’s “The Subject and Power”. In a research paper entitled, “The Loss of National Identity in Sam Shepard’s *The God of Hell*”, Sahar Mokbel (2013) discusses the ways in which Shepard satirizes George Bush’s administration and their policies after the 11 September, 2001 attacks. In Konstantinos Blatanis’s study entitled “Mediating Acts of War/Staging Crises of Sensibility: David Rabe’s *Sticks and Bones*, Eve Ensler’s *Necessary Targets*, and Sam Shepard’s *The God of Hell*”, he focuses on three contemporary American dramatists and their attempts at offering innovative responses to moments of socio-political and cultural crises brought about by the Vietnam War, the Bosnia-Herzegovina War, and the war on terror, respectively (Blatanis 2008). Moreover, the play has also been approached from a social perspective as a commentary on the loss of national identity. A dissertation entitled “The Nightmare of the Nation: Sam Shepard and the Paradox of American Identity” written by Paul Seamus Madachy (2003) examines Shepard’s conception of the American identity and its transformation. To the best of my knowledge, although there have been considerable critical studies of Shepard’s *The God of Hell*, none to date has investigated the depiction of the natural world in the play, from an eco-Marxist perspective, paying attention to the significant relationship between man and the physical world.

The aim of this interdisciplinary study that binds drama with eco-Marxism is to examine the depletion of natural resources and the drastic transformation of the traditional American lifestyle caused by the capitalist system, in one of the most controversial plays by Sam Shepard. Eco-Marxism is a political belief system that combines the Marxist belief of anti-capitalism with ecology and pro-environment policies. This paper attempts to study Sam Shepard’s *The God of Hell* using an eco-Marxist lens to reveal the effect of capitalist systems on man’s physical well-being and the environment. The paper seeks to postulate that the play under study has two traits: the inseparability of environmental degradation and social oppression and the environmental activism that aims at saving the earth and its dwellers from annihilation. This paper argues that the play reveals the capitalist system’s manipulation of violent mechanisms to subjugate both nature and man and that the exploitation of nature is exposed through physically and emotionally exploited humans. My argument is based on the hypothesis that the play works as an insightful discussion of the voluminous scale by which
capitalists’ pursuit of rapid profit alienates man from his environment with the aim of highlighting the socio-ecological rift and trying to restore social metabolism. In *The God of Hell*, the land has been centralized, eco-degradation is addressed, the need to create awareness on the sustenance of the ecosystem is stressed and the nature/culture binary opposition is deconstructed. The present research paper employs the methodology of eco-Marxism as a means of adopting an “earth-centered approach” (Glotfelty and Fromm 1996, xix) to the play selected for the study. The research tries to answer the following questions: what is the role played by capitalism in alienating man from his environment? To what extent has the capitalist system caused degradation to man and his natural surroundings? Through what methods have the capitalist power structures transformed traditional lifestyle in the countryside? The paper seeks to prove that the play under study highlights capitalist paradigms’ responsibility for the socio-ecological predicaments, explores the interplay of the human and the natural world and investigates the urgent necessity to stop the threatening danger.

One of the aims of Ecocriticism is the deconstruction of nature/culture duality. It does not limit the world to the social realm, but it links the human world with the larger world that is “the entire ecosphere” (Glotfelty and Fromm 1996, xv-xxi). Ecocriticism engages itself in examining the representation of environment in literature from an interdisciplinary perspective that links literature to politics, science and morality (Clark 2001, 2-8). Moreover, ecocritics aim at subverting the discourse and the practices related to the ideology of anthropocentrism in favor of biocentrism that would replace man’s abuse of nature with man’s recognition of the value of nature. Gabriel Egan, a well-known ecocritic, points to the role played by the Industrial Revolution in the exploitation of the natural resources and in shaping the human attitude towards nature (Egan 2006, 22). He asserts that ecocriticism is concerned with “all that happens in literary culture that tends to create or sustain the political, social, and cultural conditions that ecopolitics seek to change” (34). This means that ecocriticism does not confine itself to reading works written about nature as it attempts to prove that ecological, social and political concerns are interrelated. Furthermore, ecocriticism pays attention to both social and environmental concerns by “developing insights of earlier critical movements, ecofeminists, social ecologists and environmental justice advocates” (Garrard 2004, 3).

In *Land/ Scape/ Theatre*, Chaudhuri and Fuchs have called for a new way of looking at nature and landscape in drama. Rather than regarding them as part of an external setting that serves the human who occupies the central position in the
play, the nonhuman is given agency. This means that the converge away from anthropocentrism marks a transformation of the natural landscape into a living space; to “a way of seeing an ideologically and psychologically revealing statement about our relation to the world around us, to a way of not seeing, of masking and occluding the unsavory truths about our relations to each other and to the land we supposedly share” (Chaudhuri and Fuchs 2002, 1). Thus they have stressed the ecocritical significance of the play’s setting through power and autonomy granted to it as part of the posthumanist approach.

According to David Pepper, Eco-Marxism is defined as “sociopolitical ideology that fuses the Marxist critique of capitalism with ecological issues and pro-environmental movements” (Pepper 1993, 23). Depending on the ecological Marxist writings of Karl Marx, and John Bellamy Foster, the research analyzes the devastating influence of the Capitalist policies on the ecosystem in Sam Shepard’s The God of Hell. An Eco-Marxist reading of the play signals how capitalists’ destructive political and economic structures are the origins of environmental deterioration and social injustice. In his Early Writings of Karl Marx, he points out:

Man lives from nature, i.e. nature is his body, and he must maintain a continuing dialogue with it if he is not to die. To say that man’s physical and mental life is linked to nature simply means that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature. (Marx 1975, 328)

In Marxist thought, much emphasis is placed on the idea that man and nature should be in harmony. Marxists harshly criticize capitalist systems as the root cause of man’s alienation and earth’s subjugation. Just as the capitalist regime exploits nature and its resources to the full extent through globalization and industrialization to accumulate wealth and acquire rapid profit, it also forcibly imposes servitude on the working class. One of the effects of globalization is trade liberalization and the flow of products and capital across borders. To maximize their profit, firms pressure governments to lower labor costs. Growth in international trade and the transfer of goods between importers and exporters have resulted in harmful transport related global emissions from fossil fuel use and oil spills that damage the natural environment.

Four key concepts, coined by Marx and used extensively by Bellamy Foster, a well-known ecological Marxist, are used in the analysis of Shepard’s The God of Hell. These are: “Social Metabolism”, “Metabolic rift”, “Commodity Economy”, and “Second Nature”. The term “Social Metabolism” refers to “a
process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature” (Marx 2004, 554). It entails man’s interaction with nature; an interaction that guarantees man’s survival and nature’s continuity. However, this interaction has already been interrupted by greedy capitalists who have paid much attention to economic considerations at the expense of the ecological considerations. Therefore, “Metabolic rift” or the callous destruction of the biosphere and the instability of man’s relationship with nature have become the consequences of the exploitative capitalist policies and practices. These practices include, for instance, large-scale industry that results in pollution and energy consumption. Consequently, nature is completely abused by capitalism. Rubin Patterson points out that “the environment cannot sustain capitalism and capitalism certainly cannot sustain the environment” (Patterson 2010, 74). Several environmentalists focus on the contradiction between capitalists’ practices and environmental social justice as the former work for the aspects of production and consumption for their own sake ignoring environmental sustainability.

“Commodity Economy” refers to the idea that laborers have been transformed into a commodity under the capitalist mode of production that fails to recognize their humanity. Synonymous with the manipulation of people, the exploitation of nature by means of coal, oil and natural gas depletion is one of the causes of “Metabolic Rift”. The scarcity of raw materials and the separation of the farmers from nature have become the consequence. Foster maintains: “the greater capitalism’s expansion, the more intense its ecological demands, and the greater the level of ecological destruction it imposes” (Foster 2000, 66).

Repairing the ecological rift has led capitalist forces to search for what Marx calls a “Second Nature”. After destroying the ecology, capitalists have searched for alternatives for the devastated agricultural landscape to multiply their wealth. Their aim is to establish a profit-seeking economy regardless of ecological sustainability. For example, to fix the problems they have caused to the soil, capitalists have used artificial fertilizers that resulted in pollution. Accordingly, their second nature is hazardous too since it entails environmental crises elsewhere. Karen Bell argues:

Because the system requires constant growth, excessive natural resources are depleted and unsustainable levels of waste are created. Moreover, the derive for profit encourages cost cutting, putting pressure on corporations to choose the cheapest processes. Companies have to make short-term decisions based on what will
help their business to survive, even if this harms society and the environment. (Bell 2015, 2)

The industrial capitalist system is largely criticized for its exploitation of people in the form of low wages and occasional work, and nature in the form of careless handling of waste products that cause disasters.

The illusion dominating the American conscience since 9/11 that America shall regain its previous uncorrupted rural environment once the ‘enemy’ is defeated, is challenged and satirized in The God of Hell. Shepard mourns the American culture’s drastic transformation from the patriotic cowboy culture into a culture of paranoiac fear of an unidentifiable enemy. He synthesizes various verbal and non-verbal theatrical mechanisms such as the setting, structure, characterization, theme, stage directions, costume, stage props, music, lighting, stage symbols, pauses, silences, gestures, body language and startling visual images that contribute to the depiction of the amount in which capitalists’ power structure has degraded nature and usurped power to make innocent individuals surrender.

**Social Metabolism**

A major tenet of Eco-Marxism is social metabolism; that is, human society interacts with nature and forms a self-reproducing system. Foster maintains that:

Marx avoided subordinating nature to society, or vice versa, allowing him to elude the pitfalls of both absolute idealism and mechanistic science. His metabolic analysis recognizes that humans and the rest of nature are in constant interaction, resulting in reciprocal influences, consequences, and dependencies. These processes emerge within a relational, thermodynamic whole, the universal metabolism of nature. (Foster and Clark 2020, 182)

In a mutual dynamic relation, human social systems interact with natural systems in the process of maintaining life. Unfortunately, transformations associated with capitalist system radically affect this relation. These transformations are reflected through the physical setting in The God of Hell as the shabby living room, the dimly lit rooms, the small kitchen with its “appliances dating from the fifties” (26), the “very loud, old-fashioned, crank-style doorbell” (9), the “frosty windows” (3), the “distant vague, snowbound pastures” (5) and the old-fashioned mirrors all contribute to the feeling that the
farmhouse is isolated and deserted by people. The mood of stillness that dominates the farmhouse as “nothing ever happens” (48) reflects the major changes in the twentieth century that have transformed American society. It is worth mentioning that in an idyllic setting, *The God of Hell* opens with a vivid picture of two archetypal Wisconsin farmers, Frank and Emma. The exposition in the dramatic structure sets the play’s mood and portrays a decayed landscape. The set is a farmhouse, a traditional rural house with two sparcely furnished modest rooms separated by a kitchen counter, a small couch and a few chairs. It is more than a shelter since it represents the idea of belonging and the meaning of identity. The offstage is dimly lit. There is a “dim yellow light leaking up from stairs” (3) leading to the basement. The rural setting presented at the play’s outset displays how environment is deeply involved in the farmers’ daily activities.

In terms of structure, the play is written in one act, divided into three scenes, resembling vignettes; a division which displays condensation as well as fragmentation of our modern age. Through his protagonists, Frank and Emma, Shepard grieves over the inexorable decay of the agrarian community that has been invaded by big corporations. He dislikes the rising cities that outweigh rural landscape and he instead promotes dairy farms rather than supermarkets. In his dramatic portrayal of Frank’s character, Shepard presents him as impotent to indicate that Frank is vulnerable and unable to secure his territory or his heifers from the intrusion of strangers. As a small scale producer, Frank carries out his duties with regard to his cows and his farm without complaint. He and his wife have real loyalty to their farmland. Shepard introduces his protagonists on stage in a manner that represents the traditional aspect of the American national persona. Manipulating body language as a powerful tool, the dramatist weaves the elements of nature with the protagonist’s life as he depicts Frank sitting on the couch eating bacon and singing a traditional old song that keeps him warm after working in snowy weather.

Lights are on Emma when she enters and the stage directions describe her restless movement back and forth from the kitchen sink as she carries a plastic pitcher with water to her plants. “She waters plants and returns to refill pitcher, then repeats the process” (4). The exaggerated movement to the kitchen to bring water to her plants signals Emma’s suspicion. Shepard uncovers the metabolic interaction between man and nature through Emma’s character that always talks about the weather with Frank, cares for her plants and fries the bacon. The smell of bacon softens the apprehensive mood and it is highly associated with the nature of the countryside. Moments into the first scene, Frank and Emma are visited by Haynes, an intruder, who invades their little universe. Motivated by
Exploring the Metabolic Rift

anxiety due to the current conditions in the dairy land, Emma says: “The door was open because this is Wisconsin and we all leave our doors open in Wisconsin! It’s the open-door policy” (27-28). The dramatist depicts Wisconsin as a rural area where life is based on the connection between the farmers and the land. He refers to the past history where Americans used to fear nobody. The open door is associated with freedom, peace, and new possibilities.

The close interrelatedness of man and nature is revealed subtly through body language and its effective integration into the context of the performance. Subtext is essential here, where body language gives away a character’s real intentions to the audience. For instance, the play offers an image of nurturing that leads to catastrophic ends. The image of Emma obsessively overwatering her houseplants is indicative of her interconnectedness with nature and symbolizes her yearning for children. Being emotionally involved with her plants, she cannot stop watering them. J.L. Styan points out “in the theatre an object or a situation can immediately suggest an idea or a feeling that is greater than itself” (Styan 1981, 3). Emma’s plants, therefore, can be viewed as a stage prop manipulated to demonstrate that the plants resemble children who need her care. Sherylin MacGregor observes that “women’s mothering and caregiving work mediates the relationship between people and nature and thereby engenders a caring stance towards nature. This rhetoric of ‘ecomaternalism’ is pervasive in much of the contemporary ecofeminist discourse” (MacGregor 2006, 4).

In scene two, one of the most significant examples of the use of body language is provided in the vivid portrayal of Emma’s character watering her plants in a manner that entails an idealization of nature. Shepard depicts this scene in a way that foregrounds man’s appreciation of land as a natural resource that needs cultivation. Emma is seldom still. She asserts, “If I didn’t water like this, I wouldn’t know what to do with myself. There would be a horrible gap. I might fall in” (20). Moreover, she complains that nobody farms anymore because of the government’s policies and that the land has stopped being a productive place. Transformation in the dairy land is depicted through the image of Haynes’ coffee stains on the sofa. The coffee spills now replace the blood of the birth of premature calves (48). Another example of the use of gestures and body language is provided in Haynes’ repetitive staring out the window. Moving fast to a window and looking out reflects the extent to which he is threatened by danger. Moreover, whenever the doorbell is ringing, Haynes speaks to Emma in whispers because they are both afraid of Welch and they cannot speak out loudly. Haynes, suddenly, moves towards the basement stairs and disappears. Thus, the setting and the body language continue to echo the changes or the destructive
effects that take place with the arrival of capitalism. It is worth mentioning that scene two ends with fading lights and a music interlude to provide the audience with relief after the tension created by Welch’s torture of Haynes.

As a stage prop, Frank’s heifers reveal the extent to which he is deeply attached to his dairy farm and nature. Animals constitute a part of the physical environment represented in the play. Una Chaudhuri maintains that “For Frank, his animals provide a rapture of participation in an agrarian world that is fast disappearing, taking with it the stability and certitudes once signified by the homestead, the ranch, the little house on the prairie” (Chaudhuri 2006, 52). She refers to the interrelatedness between the human and the animal sphere. Just like the green plants depicted at the play’s outset reveal livelihood and man’s association with nature, Frank’s caring for his heifers indicates the animal-human interconnectedness and biodiversity. As a term used extensively in ecological studies, ‘biodiversity’, i.e. “comprising animals, plants and microorganisms, their genetic variation and their organization into populations that assemble into ecosystems, is fundamental to the provision of ecosystem services” (Ierino 2010, 4). To highlight the intimate relationship between man and earth, Frank asserts, “We lead a very peaceful life here. We’re in the country. We’re dairy farmers” (19). The protagonists’ commitment to their land and their connection to nature is a basic theme in the play since their human identity is intertwined with the ideal biosphere. Foster points out that, “human society exists within the earthly metabolism, continually interacting with its external natural environment in the production of goods, services, and needs. As a result, the social metabolism operates within the larger universal metabolism” (Foster and Clark 2020, 182).

Through the course of the play’s events we find that both Frank and Emma fill their life with a certain obsession that controls their thoughts and behavior. While Frank is obsessed with his heifers since he always feeds them, Emma is obsessed with her plants. Both of them live in identification with nature. Shepard sheds light on the coexistence between humans and nature since Emma and Frank converse about nature and their dialogues reflect their respective fixations. As a nostalgic dramatist, Shepard yearns for the old days where Americans used to trust everybody and fear nothing. However, contemporary American society has transformed and has become dominated by paranoia. Suspicious and frightened, Emma asks various questions regarding the guest’s origin, job and identity. Emma’s dramatic portrayal is contrasted to Frank’s since she has an innate female sense of danger and a questioning mind that keeps seeking truth whereas Frank’s carelessness and apathy are stressed throughout the whole play.
His ignorance makes his submission to Welch easy since he is not aware of this danger. The play creates an atmosphere of apprehension as well as nostalgia.

**Metabolic Rift**

Marx’s theory of metabolic rift is based on the insight that capitalism causes an existential crisis in the human relation to nature. The concept refers to the “irrevocable rift in the interdependent process of social metabolism, a metabolism prescribed by the natural laws of life itself” (Marx 2004, 949). The irreparable rift in social metabolism is thoroughly tackled in *The God of Hell*. The play’s theme focuses on an ecological crisis created by capitalism, namely the environmental issue of contamination by Plutonium that threatens the global ecosystem due to America’s nuclear experiments. The action unveils that Haynes comes to the farmhouse to escape the oppressive forces of the American authority threatening him as he refuses to mend a nuclear leakage in Rocky Flats near Denver. The researches on plutonium were part of a national American project in Colorado. He exclaims, “I’m not going back there! The whole state is going to be blown off the map” (68). Haynes is followed by Welch, a secret agent of the American government, who represents another intruder in the farmhouse. The stage directions describe how he looks: “dark suit with American flag pin in his lapel, short cropped hair, crisp white shirt, red tie, attaché case in one hand and the cookie in the other” (10). Welch seems to be a mysterious dramatic character in the play as he says: “I’m not really allowed to reveal my affiliations exactly” (16). At the beginning, he assumes the identity of a salesman who sells American-made cookies and American flags. He tries to force Emma to buy a ‘patriotic souvenir’ from him to prove her patriotism. Thus, “flags” are used as a sign of loyalty and strong attachment to one’s country. In his review of the play, Ben Brantley maintains that the “American ideal has shrunk into a more material form: a small, rectangular cookie frosted in stars and stripes of red, white and blue” (Brantley 2004, 1).

Moreover, stage directions describe Emma’s reaction to his intrusion as she “stands still in semi-shock” (13). Shepard manipulates pauses and silences in Emma’s dialogues with Welch to reflect the difficulty of having communication with him. His presence in the play intensifies the symbolic dimension for he represents American capitalism apparently delivering goods, but selling the American dream and trading on people’s lives. He disrupts the harmonious relationship between the farmers and their land. Used as a symbol in the play, Welch stands for a capitalist who supports a free market economy rather than collective good. The dramatist sketches the conflict between the hegemonic
practices of capitalism and the natural resources from the incentive moment of Welch’s appearance in the play as he practices acts of slow violence that negatively affect plants, animals and humans. Foster maintains, “For Marx, the narrow pursuit of value-based accumulation, through the “robbery” of the earth itself, at the expense of eternal natural necessity, generated a metabolic rift in the relation between human society and the larger natural world of which it was an emergent part” (Foster and Clark 2020,192). Marx here points to the means by which capitalists plunder the natural resources of the earth and violate the social metabolism.

Disrupting the quietness of the natural and social order in the farm, Welch tells Emma that her farmhouse has been chosen to be a suitable place where they can apply a new policy. This alludes to the capitalist policy that works for the replacement of small-scale family farms by large enterprise investment in nuclear power and business. In other words, it marks the shift from an economy of production to commerce. As a creeper, Welch’s appearance endangers the land and the lives of its inhabitants. Just as capitalists deal with the land as their private property, Welch makes full exploitation of the farmland plundering its resources. In his *Capital*, Marx rightly contends:

> All progress in capitalist agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the worker, but of robbing the soil…. Capitalist production, therefore, only develops the techniques and the degree of combination of the social process of production by simultaneously undermining the original sources of all wealth—the soil and the worker. (Marx 2004, 637)

In the aforementioned quote, Marx scoffs at capitalism for robbing labor and nature and disturbing their metabolic interaction. For capitalists, material wealth is promoted rather than natural and social wealth. The American flags that Welch hangs all around Frank’s house work as stage images by which Shepard attacks the American capitalist policy that has a superficial sense of nationalism. Shepard points to the idea that through violent mechanisms, capitalist policies have destroyed both nature and people’s livelihood. He sharply criticizes American capitalism since it poses threats to the people and aims at accumulating money. Since his arrival at the farm, Welch violently attempts a transformation of the inhabitants’ lifestyle. After Welch’s exit, we find Emma ringing the bell to call for her husband. As a stage prop, the bell will be used again at the play’s end to highlight her resistance to Welch.
The characters in this nature-oriented play can be categorized into two groups: those who have ecological awareness and care about nature and its rights represented by Emma and Frank (before the transformation), and those who don’t care about ecological justice and rights represented by Welch. As for Haynes, his existence in the farmhouse constitutes a menace to the environment and the people as his fingers emanate “blue flashes” whenever he touches anything due to Plutonium contamination. Haynes tells Emma that this happens due to a static shock. At the end of scene one, Haynes confesses to the couple the fact that he has been contaminated in a nuclear accident. He further explains to them the nature of Plutonium: “The most carcinogenic substance known to man. It causes mutations in the genes of the reproductive cells. The eggs and the sperm. Major mutations. A kind of random compulsory genetic engineering that goes on and on and on and on” (41-4).

Shepard denounces America’s capitalist policy that invests in nuclear power. It invests money in destructive radioactive chemical compounds and nuclear weapons to gain profit at the expense of the earth and its dwellers. Since the natural realm and the human realm are inseparable, any eco-hostile activities would upset both the natural and the social orders. According to Costanza, “Ecosystem services are the benefits provided to humans through the transformation of resources (or environmental assets, including land, water, vegetation and atmosphere) into a flow of essential goods and services e.g. clean air, water and food” (Costanza et al. 1997, 253). The dramatist sheds light on both earthly and human catastrophic destruction as a result of fatal radiation produced by Plutonium. The play’s title refers to Pluto or the god of the underworld in classical mythology. As the title indicates, like Plutonium, Welch represents the “god” of hell who, as a capitalist, seizes any opportunity to commodify both nature and man. Capitalist rulers have worked on the manipulation of nuclear power in reducing electricity costs and progressively increasing their profits, regardless of the hazardous risks their developed technology pose on the environment and the lives of thousands of farmers and workers who were killed or maimed. Unfortunately, the structures of production are transformed by capitalists into forces of destruction. Rays and particles coming out of radiation have caused cancer and birth defects at higher rates even in later generations. Serious genetic damage has also been caused to the living tissues since they are deformedly reproduced. A close reading of the scene suggests that Haynes’ description of Plutonium as a “tasteless, odorless and invisible” (18) deadly substance that causes total annihilation and environmental
devastation parallels the catastrophic degradation of nature and the deterioration of soil conditions caused by capitalist commodity production. Foster argues:

Farmers not only desired, but were required by the sanctions of the market, to extract more from the soil in each successive cycle of production, on pain of economic failure. This meant that a metabolic rift, caused by the intensive robbing of soil nutrients and a boom-and-bust cycle, was built into industrial-capitalist agriculture. (Foster and Clark 2020, 111)

Thus, farmers were obliged to speed up production to satisfy the capitalist market at the expense of the soil’s fertility. Because deadly radioactive wastes have irremediable dangers, nature and man’s safety are challenged. Furthermore, Frank and Haynes’ conversation moves to a universal stance where the personal and the public overlap. Frank: “Are we talking about a world situation or something personal, Greig?” Haynes: “What’s the difference?” (19). Thus, the play calls for an end to the eco-degradation since we live in one universe. Shepard strikes the audience’s attention to the necessity of restoring a viable socio-ecological metabolism.

**Commodity Economy**

Nature’s metabolic rift caused by the ramifications of capitalist policy has affected human metabolism as well. Marx argues that the exploitation of nature involves an expropriation of human bodily existence. He refers to the numerous ways by which substantial numbers of peasants are forcibly removed from the village, thus, squandering soil’s vitality (Marx 2004, 182). In *The Robbery of Nature: Capitalism and the Ecological Rift*, Foster describes the conditions of workers:

Violence and coercion were integral components of the bonded labor system: confinement, flogging, beating, and rape were commonplace. In this living nightmare, slaves were beasts of burden, regularly deprived of the conditions that allowed for adequate sustenance. Escaped slaves were hunted, tortured, and killed, so long as there was a steady supply of more bonded workers. (Foster and Clark 2020, 21)
Foster here exposes the exploitative nature of capitalism since the bodily metabolism of workers is violated by greedy capitalists. Moreover, Marx points out that capitalist production “squanders human beings, living labor, more readily than does any other mode of production, squandering not only flesh and blood, but nerves and brain as well” (Marx 2004, 182). Shepard unveils that under the hegemony of capitalism, man has become a commodity. In scene two, the audience is shocked by Frank’s enslavement and his blind belief in the decisions of the American capitalist system represented by Welch. Frank’s conversion becomes lucid through his following speech to Emma: “He’s (Welch’s) from the government… our government… That means he knows more than us. He’s smarter than us. He knows the big picture… The Enemy” (35). Shepard exposes the process of Frank’s brainwashing as Welch manages to convince him that Haynes is the identified “enemy”. Alienated from his farmland, Frank now perceives Haynes as the “dangerous other” (31) who seems to be the messenger of a horrible god, sent to deceive him and pollute his living area. He even insults him verbally by calling him a “traitor” and “a pretender” (36). Welch attacks him claiming:

You’re contaminated. You’re a carrier. What’re we going to do about that? We can’t have you free-ranging all over the American countryside like some kind of heedless chicken, can we? You’ve already endangered the lives of your friends here, not to mention the Midwest at large. Now, that was pretty selfish of you, wasn’t it? Poisoning the Heartland? (30)

Using visual images as well as live action, Shepard depicts two levels of visual reality, thus, interpolating the torture used by tyrannical landowners against dissenters who oppose their ideology. As a means of exercising his tyrannical power, Welch exposes both Frank and Haynes to electric shocks. The development of the scene shows that they have become two helpless tortured creatures unable to resist tyranny. Haynes is “now in T-shirt, bare feet, and old khaki pants” (90). Stage directions describe him as wearing “a black hood on his head” and a “cord runs directly into the fly of his pants” (90). The audience witnesses how Haynes is hooded and wired like war prisoners. He is subjected to humiliation, cruelty and debasement. Welch says: “It’s just like holding the leash of a well-behaved dog” (90). Moreover, Welch continues his assault in an attempt to force Frank and Haynes to surrender. He even applies electric shocks to their genitalia. The audience witnesses some physical violence. The whole
scene acts as a quasi-Beckettian microcosm reminiscent of Pozzo’s and Lucky’s relationship in Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*.

The play clearly illustrates that through Welch’s character as a symbol, the cycle of ecological rift will never stop. The playwright here patently highlights how capitalist policies have invaded and destroyed America’s farmlands and subjected its citizens to humiliation for the sake of capital accumulation. As Marx puts it, the emerging “bourgeois order was a vampire that sucks out its small-landholding feudal peasants’ blood and brains and throws them into the alchemistic cauldron of capital” (Marx 2004, 128). Just as the bourgeois exploits and enslaves the proletariat, Welch objectifies Frank and Haynes. In addition, he assumes the master’s position claiming: “We can do whatever we want… We’re in the driver’s seat… We’re in absolute command now” (70). In this sense, Welch stands out as a symbol that represents capitalists who act as owners of the entire globe. Moreover, Welch explains to Haynes earlier that he wants him in “a brand-new mission” (68). But Haynes understands the nature of this mission, i.e. fixing a nuclear leakage, where “the ground caught fire for thirty days! Not trees, not bush, but the raw earth!” (69). Welch carelessly responds, “We’re doing nature a favor… We’re provoking rebirth! (69). Welch considers Haynes as a wage laborer who has no control over his life. Shepard thus unmasks the capitalist government’s power abuse and cruelty that “absorbs nature more fully and completely” (Smith 2007, 26). Accordingly, the dramatist lambasts the capitalist political ecology for systematically degrading nature and for usurping the power to manipulate innocent people.

The three-scene play is a critique of the hegemonic practices of the capitalist system that have changed the landscape and led to catastrophic outcomes in relation to human and non-human aspects of life. As the play progresses, the transformation of Frank’s character takes place in scene three as he quits his job. Costume operates a signifying system in this scene. Frank wears a blue suit and a tie and carries an attaché case. The change of appearance unmasks another inward change. Costume delineates that he now rejects his former lifestyle and seems to be at odds with his own natural surroundings. He even sells his heifers for a good price in a manner that proves capitalist exploitation of animal species. This act symbolizes losing his deep-rooted connectedness with the land and yielding to the capitalist ways of gaining profit. It refers to what Marx calls, in his *Early Writings*, the “degradation” of animal species under capitalism (Marx 1975, 239). With Frank’s heifers being sold, the symbol of a prosperous productive future for America is amputated. Foster points out, “Marx was acutely aware of the ecological conditions of animals and of the destruction and
pollution wrought on them by capitalism” (Foster and Clark 2020, 121). Marx objects to the operations of the capitalist system and the methods used in increasing animals’ production of meat and dairy that resulted in animal bodies’ deformity, suffering and abuse. Parallels can be drawn between the separation of the worker from his means of production in Marxist thought and Frank’s physical and spiritual alienation from his rural life. ‘Commodity economy’ is stressed here since farmers and laborers are transformed into a commodity under the corruptive capitalist system as they are subjugated into servitude. Furthermore, capitalists exploit plants and animals and radically alter their metabolic relations. As Marx puts it, “Cattle as draught animals are fixed capital; when being fattened for slaughter they are raw material that eventually passes into circulation as a product, and so not fixed but circulating capital” (Marx 2004, 241). For capitalists, the lives of cows are assessed merely in relation to production. They even regard pursuing energy as more essential than achieving environmental justice. Foster denounces the capitalist system because “external nature—water, air, living species—outside this system of exchange is viewed as a free gift to capital” (Foster and Clark 2020, 134). Thus, the capitalist system is attacked for being based on waste, destruction and deterioration of the natural conditions for the sake of capital accumulation.

As a defender of the traditional rural way of life, Emma tries to convince Frank to defy Welch and get his cows back. She voices her wrath: “This guy is taking over our house! He’s taking over our whole life! (79). Moreover, Frank’s fear becomes clear when he tells his wife that they are targeted and that “the plants, the milking parlor, the barn and the tractor will explode at any time” (81). The reference here is to the metabolic rift cause by nuclear explosion. Since the natural cycle has become imbalanced, nature will take revenge on those who abuse it. The tone intensifies the feelings of loss and uneasiness. Nevertheless, Emma uses visual gestures by using her potted plants as a shield to block the door in a faint attempt to save the remains of her pastoral rural life. The image of the door implies a further significance since Emma announces: “We are closing our doors to the outside world” (36). Thus, in contrast to ‘the open door policy’ that Emma adopts in scene one, she now attempts to resist the assaults of capitalism by closing the door. This suggests that the earlier lifestyle of the self-sustaining American citizen has changed due to capitalist violent mechanisms.

The end of the play is emblematic since blue flashes come out not only from Haynes and Frank but also from Emma’s plants that have become contaminated too. Emma’s green plants that are supposed to be connected with life, growth and progress are now contaminated by Plutonium. Thus, Emma’s physical,
intellectual and psychological territories have been affected too by the oppressive practices of the capitalist power structure. Significantly, the setting continues to echo the hazardous consequences that have been caused by capitalistic intrusion with nature. The original natural characteristics of the setting have been changed by capitalists’ power. The non-materialistic values of the villagers that were created by their peaceful co-existence with nature have been replaced by the competitive values of materialistic capitalism. With the arrival of capitalists to the pure and uncontaminated land, the deleterious effect of hegemonic centrism on the environment and the farmers emerges.

Stage directions provide the reader with a description of Frank and Haynes’ march as “the two of them getting more and more in sync” and “they keep marching in unison” (96). Despite Emma’s attempt to grab Frank’s arm to stop him from marching with Haynes, he continues marching. The body language suggests that both Frank and Haynes are acting under the influential magic spell of the capitalist regime. To prove his loyalty and patriotism, Frank sacrifices his heifers and substitutes Wisconsin wilderness with Rocky Buttes. His mind has become fully saturated with wrong beliefs. This is symbolized in the form of blue light flashes that come from his body. The contamination of the land is accompanied by the subjugation of its dwellers. The environmental injustice is represented in a stunning image where the three of them walk in what seems to be a military march knocking down plants. Their step over the plants is an indication of the prodigious volume of destruction brought to nature. Moreover, the death of plants is a token of the death of the American values. Welch ordering Emma to “get these plants out of here” (96) is a symbol of his carelessness with regard to nature. The pathetic military march draws the audience’s attention to the ways in which American capitalist policy has had a deleterious effect on the lives of its citizens. Furthermore, this image highlights the interconnection between capitalism and environmental devastation since it sheds light on the rift that has been created between man and nature. It, moreover, draws attention to the extent that capitalist economy is held responsible for the depletion of green areas since it is largely based on the exploitation of nature.

**Second Nature**

This refers to capitalists’ invasion of new territories after devastating the agricultural landscape to further the accumulation of capital. Mészáros declares:

A basic contradiction of the capitalist system of control is that it cannot separate “advance” from destruction, nor “progress” from
waste – however catastrophic the results. The more it unlocks the powers of productivity, the more it must unleash the powers of destruction; and the more it extends the volume of production, the more it must bury everything under mountains of suffocating waste. (Mészáros 1995, 174)

In the quotation, Mészáros points to the manifestations of the anti-ecological tendencies of capitalism no matter what sort of risk humanity will be confronted with. Ironically, instead of trying to restore a more integral relationship with nature, the grim reality is that capitalism’s pursuit of capital accumulation through ruthless expansion has resulted in planetary rifts. Using no agit-prop shenanigans, Shepard hints at the government’s adoption of capital policies that spend billions of dollars in using deadly nuclear weapons in a wider range, including launching nuclear attacks on other nations, regardless of the catastrophic outcomes such as landscape destruction and man’s subjugation. The lifeless area itself where the protagonists will go represents capitalists’ ‘second nature’ since it refers to deploying nuclear weapons and strategic warheads in other nations to the massive destruction of nature and suppression of the individuals. The image of decay is emphasized since nature has been destroyed and Frank is forced to be separated from his land and to leave his village to Rocky Buttes: “a different landscape. Wide open. Just like the wild wild West. Not a tree in sight. Endlessly flat and lifeless” (42). Significantly, Rocky Buttes symbolizes an environmentally-abused Western landscape. Defeated by Welch’s brutal suppression, Haynes seems to adopt capitalistic attitudes and proceed with bomb-making. Shepard provides an explicit critique of the capitalist American policy that invades personal spaces and dehumanizes people. Paying no attention to bioenvironmental ethics, capitalists subjugate nature to their own needs since they do not respect it for its own intrinsic value. As Marx puts it, “Nature becomes purely an object for humankind, purely a matter of utility; ceases to be recognized as a power for itself” (qtd. in Foster, 2000, 148). So long as capitalists hold power, nuclear radiation will damage each and every living cell.

Through Frank and Haynes, Shepard stresses the parallelism between the devastation of nature and the humiliation of the American citizens but through the portrayal of Emma, he highlights women’s place in the village. Emma is the only character who firmly resists the oppressive power of Welch; she is the only character who is not contaminated by Plutonium. Moreover, she represents the voice of harmony in the irreparably devastated agricultural environment. Emma’s body language reveals that she is shocked since she walks extreme
downstage and turns toward the audience staring out. Saddened and embittered, she keeps ringing a bell as a warning of the process of terrorizing American citizens, stripping them of their individuality and the destruction of the American rural idyll. The audience hears only the ringing of the bell since the music stops. Ringing the bell marks an alarm for the American government that relies heavily on destructive nuclear weapons ignoring the hazard of environmental issues; it marks a desperate call for an immediate response to save the earth from pressing ecological disasters. The dramatist manipulates lighting technique skillfully in his portrayal of this scene’s end since lights fade and get dimmer while Emma’s plants emanate blue flashes in an increasing intensity. Shepard’s aim is to warn readers and audiences that the peoples of the world will be devastated if they don’t stand together to protect their environment and resist injustice.

As the play draws towards a closure, the audience is stunned by Frank’s ironic soliloquy that seems to be highly revealing:

It’s times like this you remember the world was perfect once. Absolutely perfect. Powder blue skies. Hawks circling over the bottom fields. The rich smell of fresh-cut alfalfa laying in lazy wind rows. The gentle bawling of spring calves calling to their mothers. I miss the cold War so much. (39-40)

Soliloquy, as a verbal element manipulated in the framework of the play, marks a critique of the government’s capitalist policies that divert resources from the real threat and spend record sums on ‘modernizing’ nuclear weapons and delivery systems in the cold war era. During the cold war the enemy was an external force but now the enemy is an insider. The elements of nature including “the blue skies”, “the hawks”, “the fields”, “the wind”, and “the calves”, work as signs that connote peacefulness and tranquility. As indicated by the lines of the aforementioned quotation, Frank wants to be free like birds flying over fields, enjoying his freedom. Shepard alludes to the past when America used to be a utopian land of strength. However, the American capitalist system oppresses individuals in all places. It is, therefore, indirectly criticized for making America insecure and vulnerable to threats. The final direct address of Frank to the audience unmasks his yearning for “the world that was once perfect” (39) where freedom, ecological justice and human dignity were attainable. With this last speech, the play’s message becomes crystal-clear: regaining natural order in the universe is deeply linked to reclaiming man’s humanity. This message seems to be in harmony with the ecocritics’ assertion that environmental problems can
never be solved without paying attention to social injustice and oppression of the indigenous people. Thus, the playwright’s exploration of the need for a healthy environment enables him to explore issues of political as well as social concerns. Land devastation, political corruption and human irrationality are intertwined in the fabric of the play.

Finally, analyzing Shepard’s proto-environmental theatre through his thought-provoking play The God of Hell, has led one to explore the interrelation of the natural and the human worlds, their manipulation and abuse, in order to champion individual and collective eco-friendly programs to sustain and protect our planet. The dramatist has staged a catastrophic ecological problem, namely, Plutonium contamination, to dramatize the innumerable imprudent actions and cruelty of capitalist systems towards the environment and the common man. Through his eco-literary discourse, Shepard offers a harsh critique of capitalist practices through capturing the abuse of nature and the pathetic situation of man. Shepard aspires to achieve eco-friendly practices in a healthier environment. Moreover, he empowers women and dramatizes the need for resistance and rebellion. It is Emma who fearlessly resists transformation and who defiantly rings the bell in Shepard’s play. A close reading of The God of Hell from an eco-Marxist perspective reflects Shepard’s commitment to initiate a drastic social change through addressing the intertwined ecological and social issues in his community. His thematic preoccupation is relevant to the world at large and his protagonists embody the dilemma of the down-trodden everywhere. Obviously, by approaching grave ecological crises threatening the Earth as a habitable planet, Shepard warns us that it is due time for the whole world to work substantially for environmental justice, sustainable human development and for restoring the metabolic relation between nature and humanity.

Works Cited

Chaudhuri, Una. 2006. “Hell in the Heartland: Mapping Post-Abou Gharib America in Sam Shepard’s The God of Hell”. In Space and Place in Contemporary Theatre and Drama; Papers Given on the Occasion of the Fourteenth Annual Conference of the German Society of Contemporary Theatre and Drama in English. Germany: Trier.


Exploring the Metabolic Rift


Identity Negotiation through Positioning in Two Selected Short Stories from Darraj’s *The Inheritance of Exile*

*Dalia Hamid* *

**Introduction**

Identity is defined as people’s sense of who they are as its main concern is to answer the simple question of who we are (Djité 2006; Huntington 2004). A broader definition considers identity to be the discourse construction of membership in a group (Kroskrity 1999). For example, an individual may use discourse signifying a certain group in order to mirror his/her relatedness to that group. This process of self-identification helps people to define the entities they are associated with (Castells 2001). One’s identity is subject to change as discourse proceeds because it is created by the individual and by others during a specific situation (Smith 1992).

Discourse is considered to be a way of world representation (Fairclough 2003). Discourse analysis’ main interest is examining patterns of language, or discourses, in relation to the social and the cultural contexts of these discourses (Paltridge 2006). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) tackles discourse, whether oral or written, as a form of social practice (Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Wodak 1995, 1996). Social practices are sets of rules which are formed over long periods of time to govern the way people act and react in a social event (Fairclough 2003). Accordingly, one’s actions and reactions are tied to the timing of the event, the location, the agents involved, their positions, the situational context and the sets of beliefs pertaining to the agents. In other words, one’s practices rely on his identity and this identity is represented by one’s discourse.

Discourse about identity has to do with the persona that a particular person claims in talking. It refers to roles, rights and power enacted through language (Scollon 1996). Positioning is the act of allocating roles/positions to speakers “in the discursive construction of personal stories” (Langenhove and Harré 1999, 17). It is the discursive process by which “selves are located in conversation” through the storyline that is achieved by participants (Davis and Harré, 1990,

* Lecturer in Linguistics, Department of Foreign Languages (English), Faculty of Education, Tanta University, Egypt.
* Cairo Studies in English – 2020(2): https://cse.journals.ekb.eg/
Identity Negotiation through Positioning

The theory of positioning deals with the manner in which people use language so as to locate themselves and others throughout conversations/talks (Moghaddam and Harré 2010). Fairclough (1992) explains that language has an effect on endowing speakers and addressees with certain positions. Interactive positioning has to do with the effect of a person’s words on the position of another; reflexive positioning refers to cases “in which one positions oneself” (48).

Susan Muaddi Darraj is a daughter of immigrant Palestinian parents. Darraj’s *The Inheritance of Exile* (2007) is a collection of separate short stories about four Arab-American women in Philadelphia: Nadia, Aliyah, Hanan and Reema. Darraj, an Arab American, also narrates the stories of their mothers, who are Palestinian immigrants. Consequently, Darraj’s short narrative contains eight stories. Two stories, that of Nadia and her mother Siham, are selected for this study. The four women live among ethnic groups - Italians and Irish-and always try to make peace between their Arab identity and their American one. The cultural gap between Palestine and The United States makes the women compare the two realities: the past in Palestine and the present in America. Reality is a social construction that is created, enhanced, switched or damaged through interaction (Gordon and Pellegrin as cited in James 2014). This struggle between the two realities/lives is negotiated and expressed in discourse. Hence, this research attempts an in-depth investigation of identities expressed through discourse: the woman’s cultural heritage as a Palestinian-Arab and her identity as an American citizen.

Narration of events and experiences is a way of learning about the roles played by interlocutors and the relevant rights/duties. Narrating in itself is a practice of giving meaning to interpret past episodes and anticipate future happenings (Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik 2014; Brockmeier 2012). Positioning Theory (PT), rooted in cultural psychology and feminism, is about discourse exchanged at the present moment (Aydar 2019) and the obligations assumed among participants as the narration proceeds (Davies and Harré 1990, 1999; Harré 2012). This research is about the link between PT, as a theoretical framework, and negotiated identities in narrative discourse. PT investigates conversational interactions in an attempt to uncover the role-based identities among characters and the way they perceive themselves.

**Aim and Significance**

This research aims to explore the linguistic construction of positioning-negotiated identities in two selected short stories from Susan Muaddi Darraj’s
The Inheritance of Exile (2007). Guided by positioning analytical framework proposed by Langenhove and Harré (1999) and Davies and Harré (1990), this research seeks to examine Nadia’s and Siham’s identities, as being examples of Arab Americans who experience double lives. This examination is significant in the sense that it sheds light on Nadia and Siham’s fight, which is exposed by discourse, for making harmony between two completely different worlds: the Arab and the American. It also uncovers the way Nadia and Siham struggle to harmonize their Palestinian root/identity with their present American identity. Thus, this study aims at answering the following questions: What does positioning analysis tell about Nadia and Siham’s identities and inner conflicts? What are the positions Nadia takes on? How is she positioned by others? What are the identities uncovered by Nadia’s positioning of her own self and others? How is Siham positioned throughout the storylines? What are the identities negotiated by Siham’s discourses?

Theoretical Framework

Positioning as a concept has been introduced by Smith (1988) in his differentiation between a person as an agent and the subject. While the former refers to the doer of the action, the latter has to do with the subject-position rendered by discourse (Davies and Harré 1990). Positioning varies according to the circumstances and social contexts people are part of (Davies 1989). In consequence, the subject may have more than one position according to the storyline he/she is involved in. Accordingly, “the discursive production of a diversity of selves” is worthy of attention and examination (Davies 1989, 47). This is a preliminary step towards the detection of identity construction in interactions.

According to Langenhove and Harré (1999), the concepts of “positions/positioning” are introduced by Holloway (1984) when she discusses positions and gender differentiations in discourse. Rom Harré further develops the theory (2012) and expands it in collaboration with his fellows (e.g., Davies and Harré 1990, 1999; Harré and Langenhove 1991; Langenhove and Harré 1999). Positioning is the construction of “personal stories” through which a person’s acts and attributes become intelligible (Langenhove and Harré 1999, p.16-17). Positioning is the discursive process by which persons are located in discourse (Davies and Harré 1990). Each interlocutor may position others or be positioned by them (e.g., responsible or irresponsible, controlling or powerless, active or passive, ingroup or outgroup). In narration, positions adopted by
characters are related to storylines. Someone may be positioned as a powerless victim in court, and an oppressor in the storyline of familial life.

A position points out personal traits. It is the total sum of obligations, rights and duties in a social milieu. It limits what a person can say or do (Harré and Moghaddam 2003). Positioning is about assigning positions, the process by which people are located in an interaction (Davies and Harré 1999). When one assumes/assigns duties and rights in conversation, he/she positions himself/herself in a certain storyline (Tan and Moghaddam 1999). Positioning refers to the discursive self-construction through words, especially personal stories (Tan and Moghaddam 1999). In this concern, positions are different from roles in being more dynamic. Negotiation of identity in a communicative act is a basically energetic process (Davies and Harré 1990).

Positions are consequences of conversations in which speakers establish “a sequence of position/act-action/storyline triads” (Davies and Harré 1990, 20). Each act evolves according to a certain storyline, which is defined as being the context of the act (Slocum and Van Langenhove 2003). Storylines are clusters of narratives resulting in the evolving of incidents and the setting of positions (Moghaddam et al. 2008). The storyline determines the positions negotiated. The position is the part played; the status negotiated in the storyline. Acts are actions performed by persons and become meaningful in a joint storyline (Harré 1997). New storylines require developing acts which, in turn, lead to new adopted positions. Consequently, the storyline is determined by positions and speech acts. In this regard the storyline, the position and the action are all interrelated in the sense that these are elements determining one’s position. Langenhove and Harré (1999, 18) define the previous tri-relation as being the positioning triad/triangle:

![Figure 1: The Positioning Triad/Triangle (Langenhove and Harré 1999, p.18).](image)

The notion of speech acts (Austen 1962) is pivotal in positioning analysis. Speech acts have to do with the pragmatic function of certain utterances. In pragmatics, which is about meaning in use, there is a gap between the literal
meaning of a sentence and its communicative function. Some verbs, a case in point is “I promise”, have the pragmatic functions of performing rather than stating that one is promising. Performative verbs such as “promise, request, judge, call, apologize” are called illocutionary acts. Illocutions are performing acts through utterances. Perlocutionary forces are what is achieved as a consequence of saying something.

Searle (1975) classifies illocutions into:

1-assertive: an illocation that represents a state and commits the speaker to the truth of the proposition.
2-directive: an illocation that makes the hearer do something.
3-commissive: an illocation that commits the speaker to a future action.
4-expressive: an illocation expressing the speaker’s attitude or emotions concerning a state.
5-declarative: an illocation causing a certain state.

Modes of Positioning

People’s words may be other-oriented, positioning the others, or self-oriented, positioning the self. The former case is “interactive positioning”, while the latter is “reflexive positioning” (Langenhove and Harré 1999). Langenhove and Harré (1999) add that positioning is basically distinguished between first and second order positioning.

First order positioning refers to a person’s roles that are initially negotiated in conversation. For example, If A says to B “prepare food”, this means that A and B are positioned in a way that makes A entitled to give orders to B who can be commanded. First order positioning is performative and tacit. It is performative in the sense that people position themselves within a progressing storyline. A person, for instance, may order another one to leave. The result may be the act of leaving. As a result, first order positioning leads to an action, a performative act. Performative positioning is the consequence of accepting whatever may be imposed by a speech act. First order positioning is tacit because people participating in conversation do not position themselves, and others, intentionally.

Second order positioning has to do with resisting first order positioning through questioning it. When a person defies first order positioning by assuming a right to refuse to behave according to it, he/she repositions himself/herself in what is called second order positioning (Langenhove and Harré 1999). This repositioning is accountive in the sense that repositioning entails “talk about talk…within an ongoing discussion” (21). It is also intentional.
When a person positions, or repositions, himself/herself and others in a current conversation, this practice is either first or second order positioning. If a person discusses or criticizes previous interactions with whoever uninvolved in them, which is explained by Langenhove and Harré, (1999, 21) as being “accountive positioning outside the initial discussion”, this act is third order positioning.

Moral positioning is understood within people’s roles and the institutional features of a situation. When the storyline moves to consider private circumstances or individual traits, personal positioning becomes at hand.

Types of Intentional Positioning

According to Langenhove and Harré, (1999), types of intentional positioning include deliberate self-positioning, forced self-positioning, deliberate positioning of others and forced positioning of others.

**Deliberate Self-Positioning**

Deliberate self-positioning has to do with an interlocutor’s act communicating a certain personal identity. This is achieved by indicating one’s agency, referring to one’s rights and potential. The first-person singular pronoun “I” is a grammatical device signifying a specific personal identity. A second strategy expressing deliberate self-positioning is the indication of personal points of view and experiences. A third strategy is to mention events and actions in an individual’s biography. Narrating what one sees, experiences and does is an indicator of personal identity and deliberate positioning of the self.

It is thought that pronouns signify the way a person positions another as being an ingroup member, through the use of “we”, or an outgroup member, through using “you”.

**Forced Self-Positioning**

When a speaker has to report personal incidents because somebody else initiates a question inquiring about these incidents, the speaker is forced to position himself as a respondent. This forced positioning may be moderate, between peers, or strict, in institutional settings.

**Deliberate Other-Positioning**

People may deliberately position another person either in his presence, through offering him/her a location in a story, or his/her absence, through telling a gossip.
**Forced Other-Positioning**

When a person is forced to describe an act and, accordingly, positions the doer of the action, this refers to forced positioning of others. This positioning may take place in the presence or the absence of the person positioned.

The following table is prepared for this research in order to summarize the different modes of positioning:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First order positioning</th>
<th>Second order positioning</th>
<th>Third order positioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial positioning of self/others in talk.</td>
<td>Challenging first order position through refusal, denial or questioning.</td>
<td>Positioning outside the current talk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performative and tacit.</td>
<td>Accountive and intentional.</td>
<td>Accountive and intentional.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative to the current episode</td>
<td>Relative to the current episode.</td>
<td>Outside the current episode.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unintentional</td>
<td>Deliberate (expressive of identity through showing agency, personal views, experiences and using pronouns.</td>
<td>Deliberate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1: Types/Modes of positioning.**

**Methodology**

Data of this paper are the two selected stories, Nadia and her mother narrated in Darraj’s *The Inheritance of Exile* (2007). Data are available online at [https://www3.nd.edu/~undpress/excerpts/P01156-ex.pdf](https://www3.nd.edu/~undpress/excerpts/P01156-ex.pdf). Siham is Nadia’s mother. In consequence, both represent a clear image of the problems encountered by the older and the newer generations of Arab immigrant in America. Though Darraj’s *The Inheritance of Exile* contains eight stories, the current research has a focus on two for the purpose of its size. In spite of examining two stories out of eight, these stories summarize the main sufferance Arab-American immigrants endure.

The framework of analysis is the theory of positioning proposed by Langenhove and Harré (1999) and Davies and Harré (1990). Nadia and Siham are representatives of the cultural conflict undergone due to their attempt to make peace between the two identities: their Arabic roots and their present American
citizenship. Positioning analytical framework is applied to signify that struggle as apparent in discourse. For this reason, some extracts from Nadia and Siham’s storylines are linguistically analyzed. Throughout the positioning analysis, the storyline is used to refer to the beginning of an experience that may have its impact on the character’s identity. When the extract begins a new storyline, a new event or a new experience is narrated. Nadia and Siham’s stories are analyzed. Each significant quote in both stories is studied in the analysis section. Numbers following each extract represent the page number of that extract in the original narrative. Storylines, positioning analysis and speech acts are considered in relation to identity construction. For each quoted part, the mode and the type of positioning are explained. The analysis section is followed by a discussion. The discussion section throws light on the major implications and the interpretations of the study. The conclusion summarizes the findings. In the end, limitations of the study and suggestion for further research are illustrated.

Analysis: Negotiating Identity

A daughter of Palestinian immigrants who has settled into the southern part of Philadelphia, Nadia is caught between her cultural heritage from the Middle East and her present in the United States. Siham, Nadia’s mother, has a separate story. Both stories, Nadia and Siham’s, indicate the struggle between their Arab identity and the American one. Analysis starts with Nadia because her story is narrated first in Muaddi Darraj’s *The Inheritance of Exile*. A storyline is used to refer to a new narrative thread. Each new experience represents a new storyline. Accordingly, one story may have many storylines.

Through the story, Nadia was twenty-one. She was born in the United States to a Palestinian mother, Siham, and an American father, Nader, who was born and raised in Palestine. Nadia was brought up in a culturally-Palestinian household by parents who emigrated from Palestine to America. Accordingly, she is familiar with American customs and Arab inheritance. She is surrounded by the American culture, but consumed by Arab traditions. The coming analysis attempts to shed some light on Nadia as a female, Arab and American persona.

Nadia’s first speech act is an assertive illocution stating clearly that she has Arab legacy: “Nobody believes what I said about Siti” (3). In these words, Nadia comments on other people’s talks that are not present at the time of speaking. This is a personal third order positioning as she locates herself as being different from the rest of her family. She communicates her distinct personality through the subject position “I” which locates her as an active person. Her Arab identity, apparent from the word “Siti” which is the Arabic equivalent of “grandmother”,

34
comes first. Nadia’s first speech act deliberately positions her as an Arab, active and distinct character. She positions her own self as being stubborn. This is indicated when she refuses her mother’s statement that the grandmother is dead. Nadia uses a personal second-order positioning to deliberately communicate her headstrong personality in “But I saw her (Siti)” (4)

Nadia deliberately/personally positions herself as a sensitive daughter in a totally new storyline when she remembers her dead father “as he looked when he played baseball with me” (4). The previous assertive speech act reports Nadia’s American habits, playing “baseball” with her father. After sharing with the readers her experience about playing baseball, Nadia narrates a new experience that marks a new storyline. She, again, deliberately positions herself as a delicate granddaughter with Arab cultural heritage in “while listening to her tapes of Om Kulthoum” (p.4). In this new storyline, Nadia reports her Arab roots as she refers to an Arab super star in singing, Om Kulthum. The previous two extracts are instances of third order positioning. Recollecting past memories, Nadia positions her own self as having both American and Arab identities. She dreams of her grandmother saying, “You have to help her, habibti” (5). In this directive speech act, a new storyline begins in which Nadia is positioned as being helpful to her mother. This is a first-order moral positioning which calls up Nadia’s Arab identity in “habibti”, which is the Arabic equivalent of “my love”. The example presents Nadia as morally positioned according to her role as a daughter who is expected to support her mother.

Nadia creates a new storyline, a new narrative thread, when she reports “all my aunts beat their foreheads… They had flown in from Jerusalem for the funeral, arguing that their mother should be buried back home” (p.5), which is a third order personal positioning. Nadia is deliberately located amid Arab traditions. Mentioning “Jerusalem” is a clear indication of Nadia’s Arab roots. This Arab identity is brought close to a statement which positions Nadia as an American citizen: “But Mama, exhausted from crying and lack of sleep, had hysterically insisted that Siti be buried here, in Philadelphia” (5). The previous two extracts are significant in the sense that they produce a new storyline in which Arab identity clashes with the American one. Nadia’s aunts choose “Jerusalem”, while her mother insists on “Philadelphia” as a place to bury the dead grandmother “Siti”. In her act communicating her private experience, Nadia deliberately/personally positions herself as a female caught between a conflict resulting from her Palestinian legacy and her American present. So, from the very beginning Darraj seems to have a focal point. Darraj has selected discourse items which emphasize two opposing cultures. When Darraj
intentionally mentions “Siti, habibti, Om Kulthoum, Philadelphia, Jerusalem”, she makes it clear that the story is mainly about bicultural identities and the resulting inner discrepancy.

Nadia positions herself, deliberately and personally, as an Arab female when she talks about her name: “in Arabic, it meant “the dew on the flower’s petal” (6). She employs third order positioning to negotiate her personal Arab identity. She asserts that her name is from Arabic origins. The same interpretation is highlighted when Nadia utilizes third order positioning to narrate her father’s comment that “Only the Arabs give their kids names that are pictures” (6)

Cultural clashing identities are signified clearly when Nadia uses third order positioning to deliberately locate herself as suffering from inconsistent lives. Her assertive illocutions announce her factual struggle as she creates a storyline about her aunt:

At thirty, she had married a “non-Arab”, as he became known among the family, who also referred to him simply as … “al-Amerikani.” But his real name was Kevin and he was an Irish-American,… Actually, Siti was the most suspicious… “He won’t understand our culture,” she’d insisted. (6)

Nadia has already, and personally, positioned her identity as an Arab, American, and a female. The aforementioned extract asserts that the Arab culture, indicated by “our culture”, and the American culture are two opposite poles. Ingroup identity, denoted by “our culture”, and outgroup identity are depicted as being in a quarrel. Moreover, she deliberately positions herself as a Christian when she creates a third order positioning via the storyline about her aunt’s marriage in the church: “She married Kevin despite the frown that Siti wore throughout the entire church ceremony” (p.6). The previous assertive illocution reports traditions of Christian marriage. The new storyline signifies the two culturally-fighting identities. “Kevin” is a symbol of the American identity that never comes to terms with the Arab identity which is manifest in “Siti”.

In America, it is natural for youth to have emotional affairs and talk about these affairs with their family and friends. This manner marks American identity. Nadia deliberately/personally positions herself as an American female through her assertions “I was newly in love…I thought about my date with George” (p.7). This stands as first-order positioning as it locates Nadia in a new storyline about her romantic entanglement. Her lover is from Syria and Nadia’s mother has
invited him for dinner “cooking his favorite dishes, like warakdawali and magloubeh” (p.7). This third order/deliberate positioning of George locates him in a storyline about his Syrian identity and his inclination towards Arab food. George positions Nadia’s mother as an Arab-American when saying “Maselkhair, Sitt Jundi” (p.8). In this first order positioning, he uses the Arabic equivalent for “good evening” and “Mrs.” and calls her by her husband’s surname as Americans do. This is an apparent signal of George’s inner confusion, a confusion that is due to his bicultural identity.

Nadia wants to go on a trip with George and a group of friends. She comments that this group trip will end “worry about a-naas” (p.11). She adds that “A-naas is a phrase that I had often heard her fret over: “What will a-naas say?” “What will a-naas think?”” (p.11). This third order positioning narrates a new storyline about the Arab’s concern with social gossip. Nadia deliberately positions herself, and her family, as inheriting Arab customs even though they live in America. This is a moral positioning as Nadia is expected to act according to her Arab identity and care for gossip. The Arabic word “a-naas” is deliberately used instead of its English equivalent “people”. This use of Arabic discourse amidst English discourse signifies the inner conflict George experiences.

Nadia explains what is meant by “a-nnas”:

the small but organized network of Arab women and men in America who had the uncanny ability to transmit a single, juicy nugget of information about someone’s reputation across the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea to the corresponding family network back in the Middle East. (11)

The previous extract is an assertive illocution beginning a new storyline about the Arab tradition of gossip. This is a third order/deliberate positioning of Arab groups as being fond of rumors and scandals. Nadia is morally positioned as being a victim of belonging to a chattering society, in reference to her Arab identity. This example delivers the message that Nadia positions Arab immigrants as being a source of trouble.

Muaddi Darraj presents another related short narrative. It is about Siham, Nadia’s mother. Siham stands for the first generation of immigrants. In telling Siham’s story, Darraj tries to mirror cultural conflicts and struggles of double identities experienced by Arab immigrants over generations.
After Siham marries Nader, she has to travel to America where they both settle down. The start of Siham’s life in America is marked by a comparison between her parents’ home in Palestine and her new flat in America:

The floors of the apartment were what Nader called “hardwood”- … She’d never seen floors like this; her parents’ home had marble floors in every room. In Jerusalem, all the homes, even those of the very poor, were made of stone. (15)

Siham is deliberately, and personally, positioned, by the narrator, as being captured by two cultures: that of Jerusalem and that of America. This extract, through a third order positioning, asserts Siham’s double identities. The storyline in this extract illuminates two contrastive settings between which Siham is located.

Siham is deliberately positioned, once more, as being suspended amidst the two lives. Nader buys her a present, which leads to a comparison between two worlds:

It used to cost her thirty shekels, or ten dollars, in Jerusalem’s finest drug stores. Here, in America, it was only two dollars at Eckerd. The most amusing things he bought her were Barbie dolls, the most American toy of all, with their long blonde plastic hair. (16-17)

Siham is located in the middle between past experiences and present life. The previous extract employs a third order personal positioning to deliberately position Siham among past memories and present events. The storyline includes both sides of her life: the past in Jerusalem and the present in America. The assertive illocution indicates her actual battle between what was and what is.

She is deliberately/personally positioned by the narrator as being a person suffering from language differences and the resulting troubles in communication. This is indicated in the third order positioning which reports a new storyline about Siham’s moral problematic position. Siham has to learn English so that she may be able to communicate with other people in her new life: “She practiced her English like a religion…”and she rehearsed her verbs for at least an hour every morning (17). The narrator deliberately positions Siham as an Arab female sticking to her Palestinian identity: “She was embroidering a small coin purse for herself, using the black and red design of the Palestinian villages” (17). This third order personal positioning is followed by another one
which starts a new storyline locating Siham in her new American society: “Her English book lay open on the armrest and she read the sentences aloud” (17). A third order personal positioning comes next so as to emphasize Siham’s fighting identities “especially practicing the words with the letters “p” and “v,” which did not exist in the Arabic alphabet.” (17). Each of the previous positioning examples defines a new storyline stating Siham’s Arab identity, her American identity and the resulting struggle between the two cultures. Assertive illocutions make it clear that Siham is deliberately positioned as standing in the middle of two contrastive cultures.

Siham feels anxious when a lady calls and asks about “Nader”. Nader, in an attempt to reassure Siham, deliberately positions her as an Arab wife when he prefers the Arabic word “Habibti” (18), which means “my love” in English, in order to relieve her. Another storyline follows and another second order positioning locates Siham as an American citizen when Nader asserts: “in America, that’s what they do. These telephone people; they don’t use ‘Mr.’ and ‘Mrs.’ anymore” (18). A third storyline follows in which Nader deliberately positions Siham as being entrapped in the conflict between her two contrastive identities in “You’ll get used to these little cultural things” (18). Nader’s use of assertive speech acts serves his point that he reports facts about Siham’s cultural differences.

The narrator generates a storyline through assertive illocutions. Via these illocutions, Siham is deliberately/personally positioned as being isolated in “South Philadelphia” where “Siham felt it was an island, lonely, despite the flow of people” (18). This positioning is of a third order type because it states facts about Siham. These facts are out of an ongoing conversation and not part of the current conversation. This instance of positioning is very critical as it interprets the title of Muaddi Darraji’s narrative. Siham is positioned as being exiled in Philadelphia where she inherits alienation and loneliness. Storylines become more effective when they report comparisons between Jerusalem and Philadelphia, or the past identity (Arab) and the present one (American). These storylines, expressed via assertive illocutions, position Siham in her dilemma of hesitation between past and present life. A third order personal positioning is made by the narrator to deliberately locate Siham as a confused immigrant having a past clashing with the present:

Sometimes, the Italian Market reminded her of the Old City quarter of Jerusalem… In Jerusalem, she could bargain with the peddlers. In fact, they were insulted if you did not engage them in some level of
negotiations. But in the Italian Market, the price was set. She knew because she’d once tried to talk the fruit man down two dollars. “Hey lady, no bargaining! This is already a bargain, ahw-ight?” Even this talent was taken from her here. (p.18)

The last statement in this extract “Even this talent was taken from her here” generates a storyline in which Siham is deliberately positioned as being deprived and disadvantaged. This assertive speech act is another inheritance of Siham’s exile in America.

The narrator returns to Siham’s past life in Jerusalem before her marriage and her travel to Philadelphia. The new storyline recites incidents in which Siham is deliberately/personally positioned as having a purely Palestinian identity. Through third order positioning, Siham is situated “next to the entrance to the Dome of the Rock” in the “Old Country” (19). She paid “eight shekels” for a wallet while Nader who is “one of these returning American Arab nouveau riche” and “Amerkani” paid “fourteen” (19). Nader, in contrast to Siham, is being positioned at this point as having two identities. The storyline shifts to another location in Jerusalem. Again, Siham is deliberately/personally positioned as being a Palestinian-Arab citizen. Assertive illocutions position her as having an Arab identity: “… (Siham) sipping the bitter Turkish qahwa from the small, enameled cup. The boy shot in the riots yesterday had died last night. There were expansions planned for six more settlements, four in the West Bank” (19).

Siham’s mother likes Nader because he complements “her cooking, the spice in her falafel, and the texture of the laban in her mansaff” (p.20). This third order positioning sets Siham’s Arab identity through illocutions which assert Arab traditions in cooking. This storyline confirms Siham’s past Arab identity, yet it rapidly shifts to mark a new one: “One month later, after he and his family had formally asked for her hand in marriage, Siham applied for a visa to the States. Nader had recently become a citizen himself, so she filed happily as “spouse of U.S. citizen.” (20). This asserts the very beginnings of Siham’s position as having newly American identity. Through a deliberate third order positioning, she is morally placed at her first journey towards having an Arab-American identity.

A new storyline recounts Siham’s new position as an Arab-American wife. Events move to take place in Philadelphia, at Siham and Nader’s apartment. In this new storyline located in America, Siham is deliberately/personally
positioned as an American citizen with Arab roots and traditions. Hence, the two identities are positioned facing one another:

When they’d first moved into the apartment...Siham had insisted on first driving a small nail in the wall so that she could hang a charm above their heads. It was a blue glass stone, with an eye painted on it, a charm that hung in every home in Jerusalem. “To ward off the Evil Eye.” (20)

In Philadelphia, Siham follows Arab legacy as she believes in the evils of envy. As an Arab from Jerusalem, she hangs a charm so that it may prevent “the Evil Eye” in America. This storyline, and the related third order positioning, crystallizes Siham’s contradictory identities. She behaves as a purely Palestinian female though she is in “Philadelphia”.

In spite of living in America, Siham is still attached to her Arab identity. A new incident reflects that conflict. A blonde woman demands to see Nader. In this storyline, Siham is deliberately positioned as a typical Arab wife: “she questioned Nader about it, as soon as he walked into the apartment” (22). This third order positioning further develops a situation in which Siham is deliberately positioned as being a tough detective as her very name refers to: “Her father used to say, as he furrowed his shaggy brows, that his daughter had been aptly named. Siham meant “arrows” in Arabic. Straight to the target. No deviations” (22).

Comparisons between Jerusalem and Philadelphia are frequent contexts in which Siham is deliberately/personally positioned as a female suffering from two irreconcilable identities. The following assertive illocution is a third order positioning which determines that strife: “By October the leaves on the occasional tree in South Philadelphia began to change colors. The trees in Jerusalem were mostly olive trees and they didn’t change colors” (22). Siham is, once more, deliberately positioned as being a castoff prisoner. When communicates with her sister who is “at home”, Siham is located by this third order/personal positioning away from home. Her American identity is released when she mentions the American tradition of celebrating Halloween: “One autumn afternoon she slipped two leaves, a yellow one and a red one, into an envelope and mailed them to her youngest sister, Nadia, who lived at home. She also described Halloween to her” (23).

In the previous storyline/situation, Siham is positioned as being nostalgic. She is also positioned as being a lover of American traditions, expressed by her interest in “Halloween”. Missing her “home” in Jerusalem and showing interest
in American traditions, Siham is personally positioned, via assertive speech acts, as attempting to reconcile between her two realities. Her fight to adapt to American traditions is reported in her trying to resist her desire to open a letter delivered to Nader. She is, thus, deliberately positioned as being a confident American wife. This is a form of moral positioning because, as an American wife, she is expected to act reasonably without emotional reactions. This third order positioning places Siham as attached to her American identity: “she glanced at the letter, wanting to open it, but she was an American wife now and they were “cool” about these things. No suspicions. A marriage was a friendship in America, not a spy operation” (24).

Siham is preoccupied with comparing Jerusalem to America. This comparison is the subject of a new storyline in which she is deliberately positioned as being suspicious of Americans because of their modern life style: “Unlike Jerusalem, where gossip lines kept everyone updated on their neighbors, someone could hide an entire life, conceal so many secrets behind America’s veil” (27). The previous part is a third order positioning notifying a major distinction between Arabs and Americans. Arab morals make them spread every piece of information. Americans, on the contrary, do not interfere in others’ lives. Siham is grateful to Arab customs which leads them to detect and expose private details. In Arab traditions, couples are accustomed to hanging their wedding pictures on the wall. Siham follows that convention. In doing so, she is positioned as a typical Arab wife. This is deliberate/third order positioning. Moreover, the wedding portrait generates a storyline that pertains to Siham’s Arab identity: “Siham gazed up at the portrait. She and Nader stood before the white stone wall that formed the back of her parent’s house in Jerusalem. The Dome of the Rock, with its golden cupola, was visible in the background” (29). The previous third order positioning asserts Siham’s Arab identity. It locates Siham next to the most significant landmark in Jerusalem, “The Dome of the Rock”, though Siham was about to leave for America and be given American citizenship. In this manner, she is deliberately/personally positioned as standing amidst two cultures, two lives, two locations that are totally dissimilar.

“My name is Siham al-Jundi” (30) is Siham’s first order positioning for herself. This statement locates her American identity as she gets her husband’s surname, which is an American custom. This is a moral positioning because Siham is named after her husband’s surname, which is an American rule of conduct. This storyline asserts Siham’s American identity. Siham has a deep belief in “Evil Eyes”, which is a purely Arab legacy. This heritage makes her “write to her mother, asking her to mail a few more blue stones” (32). In this
storyline, Siham is deliberately/personally positioned as having an Arab identity, an identity that makes her consider “blue stones” to be a deterrent to envy. The analysis confirms Siham’s two identities, two manners of life, two styles of living and two personalities. She is a Palestinian female wife attempting to conform to her moral role as an American citizen. She is obsessed with Jerusalem though she has already started a new life in Philadelphia. Siham is split into two identities in almost every situation as she is always preoccupied with Jerusalem although she lives in Philadelphia. She is even more split than Nadia. This is because Siham always compares and contrasts Palestine with America. Siham’s divided identity makes her liken her life in America to an exile. Nadia, on the other hand, is not as psychologically-torn as Siham. She is born and raised in America, while Siham is born and raised in Jerusalem. That is why Nadia represents the second generation of immigrants who are more able to work in within the new western culture. This is apparent in Nadia’s behaviors which indicate her double identity with no reference to the idea of living in an exile. Nadia does not compare every scene in America to its duplicate one from Palestine. She is not as prepossessed with Palestine as Siham. This is a normal act in the light of their different childhood circumstances.

**Discussion: Biculturalism and Identity Discourses**

Muaddi Darraj is an example of bicultural writers. Accordingly, two identities are expected to be discovered in her very words. It is not surprising that Darraj has a tendency to present characters having bicultural identities in her stories. She tends to narrate the cultural conflicts suffered by her characters, the conflicts that she may have undergone due to her double identity. Discourse is considered to be the lenses through which these conflicts are enacted. Discourse about identity needs an approach that explores the way people are located by themselves, and by others, as discourse proceeds. Consequently, positioning analysis, the storylines created and the speech acts uttered appear to be appropriate tools in order to detect divergent identities in narratives.

Darraj seems to emphasize biculturalism and its consequentially-complicated problems as she deliberately selects discourse components which belong to clashing cultures. From the very beginning, Nadia’s storylines are composed of discourse items representing two differing cultures. This results in two fighting identities which cause uneasy life. Siham’s storylines represent a deeper clash between Arab and American cultural identities. This is expected because the first generation of immigrants is thought to be slower to adapt to change. Nadia and Siham usually narrate past events. They usually narrate their memories and
report comments which are not part of an ongoing conversation. In doing so, third order/personal positioning seems to be the dominant mode. This may go back to their sense of not being incorporated in the American society. They belong to Arab origins and their new life in America does not overpower their Arab roots. Their sense of displacement makes them escape from the present to past memories.

Assertive speech acts are almost the illouctionary force which is noted. Assertions state facts and unquestioned events. These assertive illocutions are a suitable choice because Nadia and Siham describe their life and express it throughout the story. Via their descriptions, their negotiated-double identities are asserted. Previous studies do not pay much attention to the application of PT so that clashing identities may be disclosed in short narrative discourses by bicultural writers. Approaching discourse about identity and revealing the inner struggles as being negotiated by that discourse may help in identifying the hardships which immigrants experience. As a result of having their voices and sufferings heard, immigrants may be dealt with consideration. They may be able to reconcile with their dual identities in the end.

The analysis of the texts in the previous section proves that the inner conflict passes across generations. The new generation, embodied by Nadia, has the heritage of bicultural identity. Though Nadia’s discourse shows less instances of dualism, it still reveals clashing identities. Being more able to adapt to the new identity, Nadia embodies the hope that younger generations may be more successful in overcoming cultural struggles. When Siham is positioned as being in a prison, she highlights the interpretation of the title of Darraj’s story. *The Inheritance of Exile* indicates that immigrants inherit loneliness and isolation in America which is positioned as being an exile, not the land of dreams. The assertive illocution signified by the title creates a storyline which summarizes the outcome of leaving one’s homeland, the outcome that one lives in an exile. This study has employed PT, which draws from cultural psychology, as a theoretical and a methodological framework to analyze narrative discourse about bicultural immigrants. Incorporating PT, narrative discourse analysis and discourse about identity, this research is multidisciplinary. It is expected that this paper may shed more light on discourse about bicultural identities in short stories.

**Conclusion**

The research proves that bicultural identities can be accessed via PT. Positioning analysis uncovers Nadia and Siham’s two clashing identities. Both
are deliberately and personally positioned as being displaced between Palestine and Philadelphia, the Arab identity and the American one. Nadia and Siham’s names belong to the Arab culture. The ladies carry their Arab heritage upon themselves, yet they have to cope with the American tradition. Discourse analysis proves that they are always caught between past memories and present life. This is an important finding in the understanding of bicultural identities. It helps in identifying their sufferings, a thing which may motivate the society to support them and be conscious of their problems. Biculturally-negotiated identities in short narratives symbolize real persons who suffer because they live in a place totally different from their original homeland. Persons with double identities need to be understood and accepted by whoever communicates with them. This understanding will help them to lessen their sense of confusion. That is why this paper attempts to bring to the fore immigrants’ inner conflicts.

Among the challenging aspects of this study is finding relevant literature on the analysis of narrative discourse via the application of PT so that bicultural identities may be detected. Literature is thought to be addressing emotions. Data of analysis pertain to a literary short narrative. Framework of analysis pertains to PT as a tool to analyze literary discourse objectively. Detecting inner conflicts in short narratives and observing an unbiased discourse analysis may not be easy. Yet, it is thought that researching negotiated identities via an unbiased analysis may help to illustrate the fight inside, which seems to be a preliminary step to diminish it. This research finally suggests that discourse about biculturalism and the negotiated divergent identities requires more scholarly attention from researchers.

Works Cited


Appendix
The transliteration scheme used in this paper is the Transliteration Scheme for Non-Roman Scripts, which is approved by the Library of Congress and the American Library Association.

| ا  | A |
| ب  | B |
| ت  | T |
| ث  | Th |
| ج  | J (MSA) / g (ECA) |
| ح  | h |
| خ  | Kh |
| د  | D |
| ذ  | Th |
| ر  | R |
| ز  | Z |
| س  | S |
| ش  | Sh |
| ص  | s |
| ض  | d |
| ط  | t |
| ظ  | z |
| ع  | Gh |
| غ  | F |
| ق  | Q |
| ك  | K |
| ل  | L |
| م  | M |
| ن  | N |
| ه  | H |
| و  | W |
| ي  | Y |
| أ  | a |
| ا  | I |
In the Blood: A Contemporary American Common (Wo)man Tragedy

Dina Amin*

Gaston Bachelard proclaims in The Poetics of Space, that, “A house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability (1969, 17). He also states that a, - “house […] [w]ithout it, man would be a dispersed being. It maintains him through the storms of the heavens and through those of life. It is body and soul. It is the human being’s first world. Before he is ‘cast into the world,’ […] And always, in our daydreams, the house is a large cradle” (7). In the Blood is a play, by Suzan Lori-Parks (2000), that tells the story of an African-American homeless woman who strives to alter her “cast into world” condition and create a “large cradle” out of her home on the streets. In the play, Hester is a mother of five illegitimate children, who appropriates part of the street under a bridge as her home (Lori-Parks 2000, n. pag.). As a homeless, uneducated woman, and single mother of five, Hester battles with all forms of social injustices, paramount among those is stereotyping and exploitation in contemporary US society. While battling with the various stereotypes attributed to African-Americans on the one hand, and poor women who have children out of wedlock, on the other, Hester struggles to give herself agency even though her social condition and class deprive her of any sense of power.

This paper argues that Hester’s plight is a common person’s tragedy, as articulated by Arthur Miller in “Tragedy and the Common Man” (Miller 2015, n. pag.). Her excessive need to control her life by creating a home for herself and her children on the street, is her hamartia, as her attachment to her space confirms that she implicitly believes that home is, “the non-I that protects the I” (Bachelard 1969, 5). Hester’s tragedy springs from her refusal to accept her limitations as well as her strong attachment to a space that is not hers to have,

* Associate Professor of Theatre, Director of Theatre Program, Department of the Arts, American University in Cairo
Cairo Studies in English – 2020(2): https://cse.journals.ekb.eg/
the street. Her appropriation of public space is her way to exercise power over
her life and the lives of her children, and while it dehumanizes her socially, it
provides her with an alternative to living in homeless shelters where she would
have to abide by systemic rules and restrictions. Living on the streets is a symbol
of her freedom from all forms of authority, as on the street she lives according
to her rules and values. Furthermore, the street constitutes a central space in
society that, obviously, homeless shelters do not. On the contrary, shelters can
be perceived as marginal existence in, indeed a removal from, society. However,
living on the streets makes Hester and her five illegitimate children neither in
nor out of the dominant society. She normalizes their ‘in-betweenness’ by
showing that living on the street is her choice regardless of the wishes of that
society or the authorities. While agents within her community resist her freedom
to live on public property under a bridge, she pushes back in an attempt to
demonstrate that she has the right as much as anyone else to make decisions for
herself and improve her marginal status – from her perspective – in whatever
fashion that suits her. However, “[s]truggling against her fate seems doomed
from the start” (Fraden 2007, 447) for she fails in her pursuit of independence
and control over life, largely because of her lack of means and her illiteracy.
Hester’s plight is by all means a tragedy of a common person. While,

Parks’s drama does not fit neatly into literary definitions of tragedy
because it focuses on the sometimes unfortunate and more often
terrible circumstances of everyday people. In addition, many of her
protagonists are black. (Colbert 2018, 199-200)

In spite of this statement, which Soyica Diggs Colbert articulates cynically in the
face of Parks’s detractors who believe that her writing is beneath the dignity of
tragedy, Arthur Miller poses a similar statement by stating that, “[i]n this age
[…] [f]or one reason or another, we [are] often held to be below tragedy-or
tragedy above us” (Miller 2015, n. pag.). By “us”, herein, Miller refers to the
modern person, who is neither royalty nor special in any particular way, and
who, because of his/her ordinary circumstances, cannot be considered a
candidate for tragedy because of literary tradition. After all, the doyen of the
theory of tragedy and tragic heroes, Aristotle, explains them in his seminal work, *The Poetics*, saying that

the character […] must be one who is highly renowned and prosperous – a personage like Oedipus, Thyestes, or other illustrious men of such families. […] A well-constructed plot should, therefore, be single in its issue […] The change of fortune should not be from bad to good, but, reversely, from good to bad. It should come about as the result not of vice, but of some great error or frailty, in a character either such as we have described, or better rather than worse. (Aristotle 1961, 76)

Miller, however, mocks this traditional notion strongly and shoves it aside saying that human dignity is an essential quality in all human kind, and that, “From Orestes to Hamlet, Medea to Macbeth, the underlying struggles [are] that of the individual attempting to gain his “rightful” position in his society” (2015, n. pag.). From this point view, *In the Blood* is a Miller-type tragedy that traces the downfall of a little person who tries to maintain her dignity in society but fails.

Debates over the applicability of tragedy to the layperson, as opposed to being the sole domain of the elite, which also happen to be mostly male and white royalty, have become extensive in the modern period and continue until today. Raymond Williams argues for the continuity of a single traditional notion of tragedy over the modern person’s sense of suffering. In *Modern Tragedy*, he posits his wishes to resolve, “the deadlock of the contemporary contrast between ‘Tragedy, proper, so-called, as known from tradition’, and the forms and pressures of our own tragic experience” (1966, 16). In making a distinction between tragedy and the ‘tragic experience’, Williams underscores the material point of disagreement between the traditional and liberal views of what constitutes tragedy and who the tragic hero should be. He states that the locus of the problem is a historical approach claiming that “Tragedy comes to us, as a word, from a long tradition of European civilization, and it is easy to see this tradition as a continuity” (15). This perspective clearly attaches tragedy to specific cultural roots that by definition excludes non-Europeans from the
experience of tragedy. Other theories on tragedy, such as that presented by Hegel, points out to the essentiality of freedom and self-determination of the tragic hero/heroine. As cited by Williams, Hegel maintains that the rich own their freedom, whereas the layperson is not fully free and that,

In genuine tragic action it is essential that the principle of individual freedom and independence, or at least that of self-determination, the will to find in the self the free cause and source of the personal act and its consequences, should already have been aroused. (1966, 33)

This position from tragedy eliminates all underdogs of society, be it the poor, women or the marginalized, from being subjects of “genuine” tragedy because they are not free from dependence on society or family members for their subsistence. Colbert argues this assumption saying,

Parks’s drama questions black people’s access to freedom and independence, given the violent circumstances that often circumscribe expressions of their will. [...] Parks’s drama aligns with and exceeds Arthur Miller’s articulation of tragedy, which accounts for the ability of everyday people and not just “great” men and women to participate in the course of history. (2018, 200)

In opposition to traditional doctrines on tragedy, Miller refuses to consider tragedy only as an “archaic form” that is meant to speak of the rich and famous and insists that “the common man is as apt as a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were” (Miller 2015, n. pag.). Comparable to Miller, Suzan Lori-Parks also attempts at constructing her own historical and traditional continuity albeit of the poor and dispossessed. Unlike traditional views on tragedy, hers is not based on race or religion rather it is focused on humanity as a whole and the inherited literary traditions. She “loves these great dead authors. And Why not? For her, they are also family, literally her literary ancestors. She possesses and is possessed by them; their relationship is [...] like ownership is, or genetics” (Fraden 2007, 435).
She therefore intertextualizes a number of elements in her plays with historical events and fictional works by other authors, in the same way that T.S. Eliot proposes that

the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. (Eliot 2017)

While quite critical of Eliot in his cultural imperialist views of art, Edward Said acquiesces the latter literary approach declaring that “Eliot’s synthesis of past, present, and future, however, is idealistic … his central idea is valid: how we formulate or represent the past shapes our understanding and views of the present” (1993, 4).

It is worth noting that Parks has written two plays inspired by Nathaniel Hawthorne’s novel *The Scarlet Letter*. These two plays are *In the Blood* and *Fucking A*. The protagonists in both plays are called Hester after Hester Pryne. In building Hester’s character and tragic predicament, Parks is clearly inspired here by the protagonist and plot of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, as, “[t]hrough the names of characters, Parks’s dramas often comment on how recognizability produces compassion and, in alignment with the ancient and modern drama, allows for catharsis in response to the death of a purportedly great man (Colbert 2018, 204). Furthermore, the fact that Hester ends up killing her son herself resonates the tragic fatalism pointed out by Williams in Ibsen’s play *Brand*,

Blood of children must be spilt
To atone for the parents’ guilt. (Williams 1966, 98)
Philip C. Kolin explains that, “Blood symbolizes Hester’s sexual sins and shame,” and that her blood is construed within the play as polluted (Kolin 2006, 253). In fact that concept connects her work to Greek tragedy, where pollution runs in families and becomes their impermeable sin. In his confession scene, Reverend D, who fathers her youngest illegitimate sons and is repelled by her poverty, complains that she wants to drag him down to her hunger, saying,

And now the hate I have for her
and her hunger
and the hate I have for her hunger.
God made me.
God pulled me up.
Now God, through her, wants to drag me down.” (Parks 2000, 49)

Reverend D’s repulsion of Hester poverty reflects a fear within him that her hunger and need, like a disease, could be contagious. He therefore disassociates himself from her and their son by refusing to give the latter his name or help her out financially.

Suzan Lori-Parks describes her writing style as based on Rep & Rev (revision and repetition), a concept that she borrows from jazz; this “constitutive nature of recurrence functions as a method to revise and reinterpret, moving history forward rather than indulging the compulsion to rid history of its ghosts” (Colbert 2018, 201). The purpose for this is to revise historical records that have excluded African-Americans from its written documents, as “[h]er drama contains traditional tragic elements: haunting, suffering and living with death and despair, and some formal attributes” (201). Thus, creating compassion to a generally sidelined minority. From this point of view, Parks’s tragic vision aligns with Miller’s as per the latter articulation: “The tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing – his sense of personal dignity” (Miller 2015, n. pag.).

Personal dignity is exactly what propels Hester not to give her children up for adoption or succumb to an unfair welfare system that threatens to deform her
femininity by forcing her to have her uterus removed in order not to litter the streets of North America with illegitimate children. In line with all tragic heroes/heroines, Parks portrays Hester as in, “a conventional tragic direction, an individual in opposition to society who will be punished for her opposition” (Fraden 2007, 440). Hester’s defiance of society and her poverty are embodied in her boldly occupying public space and proudly mothering illegitimate children. To her children, she explains their fatherless situation by making up a fable-like account of their absent fathers,

And one day the five brothers heard her and came calling and she looked upon them and she said: “There are five of you, and each one is wonderful and special in his own way. But the law of my country doesn’t’ allow a princess to have more than one husband.” And that was such bad news and they were all so in love that they all cried. Until the princess had an idea. She was after all the Princess, so she changed the law of the land and married all of them. (Parks 2000, 13)

Even in her make-belief tale, Hester imagines that she changes the law of the land to her advantage. Later on, when one of her children asks where the five husbands went, she confidently responds, “The war came and the brothers went off to fight and they all died” (13).

In spite of the enormous load of having to raise five children alone, without a partner, employment or a home, Hester still battles through her circumstances doing menial jobs and performing sexual exchanges for any financial help she can obtain. All the time she attempts to own her circumstances and resists being the racial stereotype of “the impoverished African-American women”, who gives her children up for sale or adoption. She therefore makes the tough choice of bearing the result of her own decisions, as bad as they are, to take care of her children herself rather than be owned by the welfare system that threatens her with dispossession, by taking her kids away, and displacement by putting her up in a shelter, which she describes saying, “the shelter hassles me. Always prying in my business. Stealing my shit. Touching my kids” (32). From this point of
view, Hester embodies Miller’s tragic heroine for, “the underlying fear of being displaced, the disaster inherent in being torn away from our chosen image of what or who we are in this world. Among us today this fear is as strong, and perhaps stronger, than it ever was. In fact, it is the common man who knows this fear best” (Miller 2015, n. pag.). Hester’s worst fear throughout the play is to be displaced and dispossessed of her space and children respectively.

At the beginning of the play, the plot depicts Hester at the highest point of contentment. Living in their home under the bridge, she cooks, cleans, irons her children’s clothes and polishes their shoes as though she is in motherhood bliss. She tells her kids: “leave yr shoes for polish and yr shirts and blouses for press. You dont wanna look like you dont got nobody” (Parks 2000, 14). She is determined to make them feel loved and special; feelings she herself never experienced as people in her life continually exploit her. Hester dreams of her children fitting in a society that rejects them, and, according to her, the way to do it is by emulating the norms of that dominant society. She therefore strives to make them not feel poor, neglected or deprived to the best of her ability. At this point, in her mind, she is living the American Dream; she has a home (although on the street), children (though illegitimate), and food (only soup) to feed her children. Like all wholesome families, she calls her children to eat dinner:

**Hester: Suppertime!**
*(She ladles out the soup)*

Today’s soup the day, ladies and gents, is a very special blend of herbs and spices. The broth is chef Mommies worldwide famous “whathaveyou” stock. Theres carrots in there. Theres meat. Theres oranges. Theres pie. (Parks 2000, 11)

At this junction, the play captures Hester as an in control matriarch, who is trying to follow the social norms of her hegemonic cultural order, and ignoring the fact that while she is part of that society, she is construed as an unfit member residing on its periphery, indeed seen as leeching off of it. As Hester lives the illusion that her life is that of a regular lower middle-class American household, everyone around her realizes that her life is a sham for she does not actually own
her freedom or dwelling space as she thinks that she does. Arranging her life the way she did at the beginning of the play is a reflection of Miller’s notion, that, “[i]n the tragic view the need of man to wholly realize himself is the only fixed star, and whatever it is that hedges his nature and lowers it is ripe for attack and examination” (Miller 2015, n. pag.). Hester’s tragic flaw is thus her excessive sense of control against all odds in her life as it is her, “inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what [she] conceives to be a challenge to [her] dignity, [her] image of [her] rightful status” (Miller 2015, n. pag.). Hester refuses to perceive herself and her life as inferior or less worthy than others who have rank, education and work. This flaw induces her to subject her body to sexual exploitation by virtually everyone around her. After all, Hester’s only possessions are her body and her children. While she refuses to sell or give her children up for adoption or foster homes, she opts to commodify her body instead. According to her, her body is the only way she could ‘buy’ her independence in a capitalist system that threatens to take her children and her reproductive organs away, not to mention putting her in a homeless shelter and off the streets. Knowing that her economic and social conditions could only lead her to either receive help from social institutions, which would be the ultimate defeat for her, because the price is her freedom, or get help from individuals, who would (meagerly) support her in return for sexual favors. She consciously chooses the second option as, in her mind, it represents a form of freedom of choice, symbolically so at the very least.

In individual monologues, which Parks calls ‘confessions,’ the characters in Hester’s life, who take advantage of her financial need by exploiting her body, talk about their feelings toward her and explain both their attraction to and repulsion of her. They all ruminate on the extent she gives her body very generously and how that drew them back to her wanting more of her body. However, ironically, instead of them being gratified by her submissiveness, her destitution wards them off, and they all admit that while they exploited her physically, they were turned off by her abject poverty, and therefore refused to help her beyond the pittance they had given her for sexual encounters with her. If anything, the confessions reveal the deep unkindness of those who have abused Hester over the years and exposes that they despise their own selves for
being attracted to someone whom they deem tainted and disreputable. Hester, on the other hand, exchanges sex for basic human rights of employment, medical care, child and social support. She is not afraid to work hard, but her professional skills are virtually non-existent. She realizes that the social order within which she lives would never support an illiterate, poor, single (African-American) woman and mother of five children out of wedlock. The only way she tries to gain agency is by way of aligning with the powers that be as her “fate is not determined by gods or heredity but rather by a society that cruelly withholds its support, manipulates [her] for its own benefit, and blames her for her circumstances (Schafer 2008, 194). Moreover, the limited power she has over her life as represented by her home on the streets and illegitimate children is constantly threatened to be taken away from her if she does not yield to society’s harsh rules.

Hester’s show of control and power is further embodied in the fact that she carries a police baton around her waist – which her son has stolen from a policeman – as a symbol of authority, autonomy and discipline, as well as for self-defense. Ironically, her tragedy is complete when in anger she kills her first born and closest to her heart, Jabber, with that same baton. Upon killing her son, Hester realizes that her ordained fate, which she had attempted to defy, had won over.

When Hester, in In the Blood, looks up in the sky and says she has seen the hand of Fate blocking out the sun “with its 5 fingers coming down on me,” it feels as though she has no choice but to succumb to what fate brings to her. (Fraden 2007, 447)

This self-destructive moment captures Hester’s recognition that she can no longer challenge the social order around her. At this point the plot arrives at peripeteia as she realizes the irrevocability of her tragic condition and fate. There she falls right into the social stereotypical racial category she had tried all her life to defy: that society construes her as a ‘slut’ and that she has to pay for that sin, which is ascribed to her by a society that exonerates itself from all assistants to the poor and disempowered.
Her favorite son, Jabber, is the one who had shielded her from reading the word ‘slut’, written as graffiti on the wall next to where they live under a bridge at the beginning of the play. He erases the slur and refuses to read it out loud to her when she asks,

Jabber: Them bad boys had writing. On our house. Remember the writing they had on our house and you told me to read it and I didnt wanna I said I couldnt but that wasnt really true I could I can read but I didnt wanna.
Hester: Hush up now (Parks 2000, 64-65)

Jabber is her favorite son in the same capacity as Cordelia is to Lear in King Lear; both protagonists tragically lose their most beloved child because of their refusal to see their own hubris. At her lowest moment and when she is rejected by everyone around her, Hester still refuses to hear Jabber read the word ‘slut’ back to her because she is still in denial that this is how society views her. When he mindlessly reads it out loud, she screams to silence him as hearing the utterance is akin to seeing herself as or becoming the adjective. Jabber, however, does not hush up as he utters the word unintentionally; his utterance becomes the prophecy that determines her tragic fate,

(She quickly raises her club and hits him once. Brutally. He cries out and falls down dead. His cry wakes Bully, Trouble and Beauty. They look on. Hester beats Jabbers body again and again and again. Trouble and Bully back away. Beauty stands there watching. Jabber is dead and bloody. Hester looks up from her deed to see Beauty who runs off. Hester stands there alone—wet with her son’s blood. Grief stricken, she cradles his body. Her hands wet with blood, she write an A on ground). (65)

With Jabber’s blood, Hester writes the letter ‘A’, which he had tried to teach her earlier but for no avail. With his death, Hester’s downfall is concluded: she loses
her freedom, her children and her sense of self and dignity. Comparing Parks’s tragic ending with Hawthorne’s protagonist, Fraden asserts that

Parks’s Hesters end up in a pool of familial blood. Her Hesters gain no peace; they lose everything dear. So that finally, strikingly and strangely, Parks writes endings that are totally different from Hawthorne’s in tone and substance. Hawthorne mitigates tragedy, but Parks is ruled by it, eschewing all audience watching. Tragic conventions loom overhead in both plays. Parks’s Hesters are on stage, and dramatic expectations and conventions shape them differently from that of a novelistic discipline. (2007, 441)

In prison, she laments having had her children to begin with, as well as for having tried to live a life beyond that which is sanctioned to her by society. In her final confession, she admits,

Kids? Where you gone?
Never shoulda haddem.
Me walking around big as a house
Knocked up and Showing
and always by myself . . .
I never shoulda haddem! (Parks 2000, 67)

Throughout the play, Hester’s children are both a blessing and curse for her in a number of ways: society treats them as a disposable burden; her best friend advises her to either put them in foster homes or sell one of them to make ends meet; the Doctor wants her to remove her uterus in order to stop having more illegitimate children; the Welfare Worker warns her that she would no longer offer her minimum wage jobs if she continues to have more children; Reverend D who is the father of her youngest child refuses to either help her out financially or give the child his name as he perceives their child as a token of his licentious behavior; Chilli, her first lover and father of her first son, Jabber, who had
abandoned her years ago, comes back to ask her to marry him but leaves as soon as he finds out she has had illegitimate children with other men.

In fact, Hester’s romantic dreams are crushed as a result of Chilli’s rejection. Upon his return, he brings her a ring and wedding dress with a veil but withdraws all when he finds out that she did not stand the test of time by loyally waiting for him. Chilli’s return is the both climactic moment and turning point in the play. His return marks the only time Hester is ashamed of her children. She lies and tells Chilli that they were the neighbor’s kids, but he finds out the truth and chides her saying,

I carried around this picture of you. Sad and lonely with our child on yr hip. Stuggling to make do. Stuggling against all odds. And triumphant. Triumphant against everything. Like – hell, like Jesus and Mary. And if they could do it so could my Hester. My dear Hester. Or so I thought.

(Rest)
But I don’t think so.

(He takes her ring and her veil. He takes her dress. He packs up his basket.) (67)

After this Hester ends up killing her son with him in a moment of deep rage, therefore killing Jabber is akin to destroying the final vestiges of innocence and beauty left in her. The irrevocable crime of course leads to her losing all of her children to foster care and be locked forever in prison as a murder not to mention living with pain of having killed her own child.

Hester’s tragedy lies mainly within the realm of her devotion for her children. Everything she had done before her fateful end was to provide for them and keep them under her guardianship. In her belief system, her children, while illegitimate, constituted her only ‘possessions.’ In capitalist society like the USA, ownership greatly valued and reflects the value of an individual. Thus, Hester’s fanaticism about ‘owning’ children is a by-product of belonging to a socio-economic order that places great importance on materialism and is obsessed with consumerism. Hence, ‘having’ kids gives her a sense of
domination and empowerment, which, in her mind, seems as though she was aligning with her social order. Moreover, her children also provide her with a sense of belonging, unconditional love and pride in spite of her abject poverty.

Hester makes the street her home; in her public-made-private space under the bridge, she commands control over her world, herself and children. She organizes her space according to the laws of ownership; she makes the rules and runs it like clockwork. When Amiga Gringa, prostitute and friend, proposes that she give her children up for adoption, Hester objects vehemently. It is important to note that children, from Amiga Gringa’s perspective, are more-or-less commodities that could yield dividends to anyone, if exploited properly. Amiga Gringa herself has lived off of selling her children. Hester, however, refuses the idea vehemently,

Amiga: Gringa: You oughta send yr kids away. There’s plenty places that you can send them. Homes. There’s plenty of peoples, rich ones especially, that can’t have kids [...]ingy Youd have some freedom. Youd have a chance at life. Like me.
Hester: My kids is mine. I get rid of em what do I got? Nothing. I got nothing now, but if they go I got less than nothing. (15)

Hester refuses to commodify her children yet in her mind they are symbols of ownership, they embody or are in lieu of property. To lose them means to be the stereotype; their presence in her life gives her value, agency and control over her life.

Her appropriation of the public space is another symbol of maintaining power. Living on the streets is a representation of both her displacement and liminality, on the one hand, but it also gives her freedom from authority, on the other hand, as she lives according to her rules and ethics. While Hester considers her occupation of public space as her protection from the abuses of social institutions, she fails to maintain her domination of that space. Hence, her tragic fall is mapped out as she ends up exactly where she had dreaded: institutionalized in prison and marginal as well as deprived of her possessions, her children, her open space in the ‘center’ of the public domain, the street. Furthermore, her final
sense of self is stripped away in prison when her reproductive organs are removed, much the same way as animals are spayed.

Hester’s journey from under the bridge to prison may seem stereotypical, but the humanization of the protagonist, who started out with a strong sense of dignity and wish to have “a leg up” in society to improve her economic conditions, creates a tragic figure who embodies the stereotype from which she so wished to run away.

While Hester takes responsibility for her actions, those in the audience who, by virtue of their race, gender, wealth, status, position, and/or education, remain members of the social structure that condemns Hester to her fate are forced to admit their complicity in what has occurred. While order is restored to society by Hester’s downfall, the audience must question whether this order offers the hopeful beginning implicit in the conclusion of a tragedy. If there is to be hope, then the audience must change. (Schafer 2008, 193-194).

Therefore, like all poignant tragedies, the tragic hero’s/heroine’s downfall brings about fear and sorrow within the audience. In this case the audience is part of the problem for they are indicted in the social order that disenfranchises society’s underdogs and refuses to give them a chance to experience life in the same way as the rest of the population. On the other hand, there is sorrow for the fall of the protagonist who tried to live up to the norms of a society that rejects her. Clearly, Hester fails at maintaining any sort of power as her presence in society along her terms is contested, resisted and downright disdained. In prison other prisoners confirm her stereotypical status in a ritual that confirms her limitations and inscribes her tragic fall:

(They spin)
SHE DONT GOT NO SKILLS
CEPT ONE
CANT READ CANT WRITE
SHE MARRIED? . . .

63
Hester’s battle with the social injustice ends with her becoming the essence of tragedy. She is cast away as do all criminal elements in society and taken from the center of life on the streets to the margins of society in prison, and there she will be literally neutered as they remove her uterus, and will be expected to ‘perform’ her socio-economic marginal status as inferior and inept.

Works Cited


Emotion as a Border: A Reading of NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*

_Fadwa Mahmoud Hassan Gad*

**Introduction**

Like many Zimbabwean students who, under the rule of Mugabe, were compelled to seek educational opportunities abroad, award winning novelist and Man Booker Prize nominee NoViolet Bulawayo left her country of origin to study in the US when she was only eighteen (Gubba 2014, 7). Falola and Oyebade assign the label of contemporary African diaspora to this process of mobility, to differentiate it from the first diaspora when slaves were brought to the new world. They add that

since the closing decades of the twentieth century…the United States has seen large-scale immigration from Africa, more than at any other period since the end of the Atlantic trade. Thus, today, Africans are among the fastest-growing immigrant groups in the United States, constituting a dynamic community. (Falola and Oyebade 2017, 1)

Many countries felt uncomfortable with the phenomenon, and it was generally regarded as a maneuver to “[transform] education institutions into visa factories” (Murray 2011, 32). In the US, particularly after 9/11, most types of travel mobility, including non-immigration visas, were also considered as imposing potential threat. Successive administrations adopted firm travel restrictions, metaphorically constructing more walls. In 2020, for example, a travel ban was signed by President Donald Trump, which affected estimated 12,398 African people, from countries that “account for over a quarter of the population of Africa” (Knox 2020). Addressing the public, the administration was keen to emphasize that the ban was a preventive security measure against possible injury. The NBC News website explains that “President Donald Trump said he signed the proclamation because of national security concerns, claiming the countries had not met minimum security standards” (Knox 2020). Ironically, the

* Associate Professor of English Literature, Department of English Language & Literature, Faculty of Arts, Helwan University.

_Cairo Studies in English – 2020(2): https://cse.journals.ekb.eg/
concerns were never shared with the public, the NBC adds. Fear was the only justification given for a whole process of emotion-charged border formation.

Not only is emotion involved in border formation, but it also affects the ethical standards that monitor this formation. As Kristin E. Heyer underscores, security apprehensions often disregard the impact of historical colonialism and the immediate factors that motivate border crossing. Heyer observes that

Tucson’s Bishop Gerald Kicanas lamented that during the attorney general’s visit to Nogales, sessions neglected to hear border narratives of immigrants fleeing impossible situations, risking dangerous border crossings “in search of protection and a new life.”(41) At his border mass in Ciudad Juárez, Pope Francis bade listeners to measure the impact of forced migration not in numbers or statistics but with concrete names and stories, evoking a counter-narrative to those dominating the airwaves: They are the brothers and sisters of those expelled by poverty and violence, by drug trafficking and criminal organizations. Being faced with so many legal vacuums, they get caught up in a web that ensnares and always destroys the poorest. (2018, 154)

The ability to perceive immigrants through “names and stories” has been an achievement marked by the bulk of critical commentary on Bulawayo’s debut novel We Need New Names. While typical Afropolitan texts as introduced by Taiye Selasi and Achille Mbembe depict privileged African migrants, who usually enjoy legal travel mobility, We Need New Names gives voice to silent, often illegal, immigrants (Santana 2016, 122). Similarly, Cobo-Piñero (2019, 473), in an article on the significance of mobility in Bulawayo’s We Need New Names, classifies the novel as a picaresque dedicated to track the “displaced national or immigrant … whose voice remains largely silenced”. Likewise, Vilasini Roy (2016, 24) reads the text not only as a version of Afropolitanism that goes beyond the privileged, but also as a platform for the transnational, subaltern subject. Fetterolf and Kane (2017, 8) find the narrative as an articulation of African diaspora in terms of cultural, linguistic and geographical distance. These readings, however, overlook the paradox that the ostensible mobility of Afropolitan diaspora is largely circumscribed by feelings of spatial enclosure and confinement that overwhelmingly dominate the immigrant experience in Names. The various readings provided above also fail to recognize how emotion patterns sustain and perpetuate the isolation of this
enclosed community. The present paper therefore explores pockets of such tension, in terms of border construction based on emotional patterns specified in relevant affect theories.

Affect theories throw light on the intersubjective dimension of emotion, showing how it is manifested in forms of proximity or distance within space. Spinoza was the first to recognize this capacity through a distinction between two types of affect, affect as an individual power to act, and affect as a reaction or an emotional state that results from interaction between bodies (Ott 2017, 10). Discussing the notion of affect in geophilosophical context, Deleuze and Guattari define the philosopher as an émigré who lives, with a group of associates (strangers in flight), on “the borderlands of the Greek world”. ‘Strangers in flight’ are engaged in a continuous process of “deterritorialization and reterritorialization” that gives them a “pleasure in forming associations, which constitutes friendship, but also a pleasure in breaking up the association, which constitutes rivalry (1994, 86-87). They also developed Spinoza's perspective along the lines of artistic creativity which they define as the ability to stir emotional sensations that occasion conditions of nearness or remoteness between physical or material bodies.

They propose that “great creative affects can link up or diverge, within compounds of sensations that transform themselves, vibrate, couple, or split apart" (1994, 175). Another significant contribution in this respect is that of Nigel Thrift (2008, 10-12) who introduces a theory which links emotion to geographical mobility. The theory elaborates on how emotion determines biopolitics of space through constructing "micro geographical landscapes". Other emotion theories which do not take bodies interaction as their starting point still recognize the potential of emotion to inflict spatial closeness or remoteness. Perception theory, for example, introduces the concept of emotion episode that involves sensory perception, concrete imagination and emotional memory as elements that create or demolish barriers. Other components of emotion episodes, such as mood, facial expression and reoriented attention, may also set borders based on in-group and out-group categorization (Hogan 2011, 46-50). Hogan adds that a child recognizes compelling or repelling barriers through mirroring of the emotional response of his/her parents. The same pattern applies to the sensibilities aroused by emotional attachment and emotional memory. Roseman and Smith (2001, 6-7), on the other hand, find that spatial distance may be affected by an evaluative process of emotional experience. They propose an emotional appraisal theory that could account for conditions such as the shift from guilt (proximity) to anger (distance) in an emotional relationship.
based on realizing the partner’s attitude. Appraisal theory can also explain how bordering may be the outcome of controlled emotions, a notion that indicates the subject’s expression of an emotional attitude that is contrary to what s/he innately feels.

Definitions of borders bear considerable affinity to the affect theories mentioned above. In “Theorizing Borders”, Brunet-Jailly states that borders play the role of “buffer zones”, keeping away the unwanted (2005, 635). Gloria Anzaldua defines a border in terms specifically related to the white/nonwhite context. In her groundbreaking book Borderland, borders stand for a dividing line between what is considered “white”, and therefore “normal”, and whatever that violates this normalcy (Anzaldua 1987, 3). The notion of border construction is frequently sustained by an urge to defend purity, as A. Ranjan explains. They are there to “keep away the pollutants, people who threaten to pollute the purity of a race or a faith (Ranjan 2018, 15). More importantly, however, borders are established to prevent the approach of fear-inspiring, hateful strangers. The feminist theoretician Sara Ahmed offers her interpretation of the phenomenon based on hate and fear as boundaries set against conceived threat of transgression (Ahmed 2004b, 132). Fear envisages the impossibility of containment as well as a mutual detachment symbolized in a sensation of coldness (126).

Border emotions often address ordinary people who dread a hateful other who might "invade" their home country and cause them pain or injury (118). Ahmed adds that the contemporary rationale that justifies borders, projects an image of a community in crisis; a community victimized by an imminent danger. This perception accumulates through two processes: motion and repetition. Borders develop, according to Ahmed, because of the motion of emotions, either by sliding sideways or going backwards. Both types of mobility incessantly extend the circulation and association of hateful attributes to an 'Other'. The dialectic of detachment and proximity is best introduced through the emotionality of texts, according to Ahmed who refers to the power of the text to “name and perform emotions through using metaphors or metonymy that help to stick figures together to create an effect” (12-13). Ahmed offers several examples to illustrate this point. For example, hate, directed at first against terrorists, gradually extends to suspect asylum seekers. Fear of rape gradually includes abhorrence of mixed coupling; phobias against immigrants soon develop into a phobia against whoever defies norms. Emotion borders also develop into justifications of aggression. Ahmed suggests that while the mobility of western subjects is defended, subaltern subjects are contained or detained. Borders thus limit the space of the feared subject (135).
Ahmed offers a macro approach that examines various structures of establishing borders. Gloria Anzaldúa’s Borderlands/La Frontera, on the other hand, conducts a micro analysis that studies reactions of the border crossers. Anzaldúa maintains that the Chicano people who travelled through, and resided around American-Mexican border, experienced a split of a people and a culture. This rupture perpetuated a wound,

1,950-mile-long open wound
dividing a pueblo', a culture,
running down the length of my body,
staking fence rods in my flesh,
splits me splits me
me raja me raja
This is my home
this thin, edge of
barbwire.
But the skin of the earth is seamless.
The sea cannot be fenced,
el mar does not stop at borders. (1987, 6)

Anzaldua recognizes that the challenge of border crossing usually entails a condition of mixed emotions, or “mestiza”, expressed along the lines of a language metaphor. Multilingualism involves multiple emotional allegiances that fluctuate between border crossing and fear of losing ties with the homeland. Victor Konrad's theory of borders in motion goes a step further by suggesting that borders also involve how people resist barriers through the mobility of debordering and /or rebordering. This paper proposes to explain how such mobility is introduced in Names through two categories: perceptual emotional episodes and emotional appraisals. The analysis attempts to show that border crossing in the African part of Names is mainly recounted through traumatic emotion memories of compulsory border crossing, while the American part is narrated through evaluative emotion appraisals of working memory that sustains cautious, calculated, and self-imposed border formation. The analysis extends to include an evaluation of the three interludes told by a narratorial collective voice that represents African immigrants. The shift from the third person voice to the first person in these interludes corresponds to a collective, communal and ritualistic emotional attitude set in antithesis to the more individual structure of enclosure. Within this theoretical frame, the analysis starts with a consideration
of emotion as a border of polarity and asymmetries, then proceeds to examine borders of regulated emotion and finally discusses attempts of debordering through alternations of collective and mixed emotional patterns.

**Fear/Hate/Anger: Borders of Polarity and Asymmetry**

*Africa*

*We Need New Names* illustrates how borders are constructed/challenged through emotion episodes narrated by Darling, a ten-year-old girl who dwells within the boundaries of an unnamed African country, presumably Zimbabwe, and who aspires to join her aunt, an assimilated immigrant, who lives in the US. Darling lives in a shanty community of expellees forced by the authorities to reallocate into a poor, chaotic borderland ironically called “Paradise.” A group of children, including the protagonist, repeatedly “hit” Budapest, the name given to a gated white community, as a defying gesture to internal borders imposed upon residents of these underprivileged quarters. The name Budapest brings associations of the central Europe city well known for its exclusionary, anti-immigration policies, the most provocative of which was the Hungarian government’s decision to establish a “4-metre-high fence along the 110-mile border with Serbia” to prevent the entrance of Muslim asylum seekers (Goździak 2019; Tremlett and Messing 2015). In this sense, hitting Budapest is like crossing the borders: “This place is not like Paradise, it’s like being in a different country altogether. A nice country where people who are not like us live” (Bulawayo 2013, 8).

Budapest signifies a barrier, a fortress; when the children manage to be inside Budapest, they are exalted by emotions of conquest, singing a song about Vasco Da Gama, the famous Portuguese explorer. Mezzadra and Neilson define internal borders as “patterns of spatial segregation … Ghettos, migrant villages and slums [are] important instance of the proliferation of internal borders in the contemporary world (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013, 150). Likewise, residents of Budapest fear *invasion* by the poorer, outcast sectors of society. A security guard, who quarrels with the children in the chapter titled “Black Power”, expresses this abhorrence in similar terms: “Your uncultured fathers started terrorizing this neighborhood. It’s your fathers who’ve been coming here, preying on the sweat of decent citizens […] and now you are surveying this place on their behalf” (Bulawayo 2013, 110). Even the NGO representatives, who come to Paradise to distribute humanitarian aids, hide behind glasses. The encounter between them and the local children is wordless, with the identity of the donners concealed: “Eyes look at us that we cannot really see because they
are hidden behind a wall of black glass” (54). Darling notes that the children are conscious of such reticent barrier, “We are careful not to touch the NGO, though, because we can see that even though they are giving us things, they do not want to touch us or for us to touch them (56).

Internal borders thus constitute the narrative’s starting point. The Mzilikazi road is an internal border separating Paradise from the affluent parts of the city. The children are given direct orders not to cross the Mzilikazi road. The name Mzilikazi brings historic associations of a great African king, and migrant, who moved with his people from the South Africa’s shores to settle in what is now Zimbabwe (King Mzilikazi). The migrant king of the Ndebele clan dominated several other races including the Shon who, after the decline of Mzilikazi kingdom, turned to form the majority of the Zimbabwean people. Although both clans fought for independence, the Ndebele community was later persecuted, dislocated, and deprived of the status of a homeland minority after independence (Moji 2015, 182). They were even regarded as outsiders: “The tag of “foreign” applies to the shantytown inhabited by the Ndebele in Bulawayo’s novel, a configuration that makes their existence and subjectivities even more precarious” (Cobo-Piñero 2019, 16).

Hate creates enclosure areas and confinement. Darling repeatedly has nightmares of the dislocation of the Ndebele community, her people. This is a typical practice of bordering based on Ahmed’s notion of a shrinkage of the black body. Even if the children are too young to be aware of all the details of this complicated legacy, they are endowed with emotional memory of the trauma of being treated as immigrants in their own homeland. In the chapter “How they appeared”, Darling records details of their departure: “Coming would mean that they were choosers. They did not come, no. They just appeared” (Bulawayo 2013, 75). In her memories, Darling recalls how bulldozers destroyed the houses of her people even though they participated in the liberation war. The accumulation of concrete details suggests a mood of chaos. Repetition accelerates the tempo of hilarious speed blended with overtones of wailing: “It is no use hiding because the bulldozers start bulldozing and bulldozing and we scream and scream” and “Why why why, what have we done, what have we done, what have we done” (67). Terror is also conveyed through merging words in one segment, or lemma, to suggest intensity and urgency: “come into the house now”. Finally, Bulawayo heaves a cluster of short, sensory and precise images, combined with animalistic metaphor, to suggest bestiality and kinetic imagery “spinning dust” to suggest urgency: “Bulldozers are already near, big, and yellow and terrible and metal teeth and spinning dust” (67).
Bulawayo thus suggests that being a refugee is not merely related to a displacement in space, since they did not yet cross an international border, but is essentially an emotional condition.

Animosity and anger engender violence. The chapter titled “Black Power” shows how, in Ahmed’s terms, “an over-investment in the wound” might evoke revenge and “allows injury to become an entitlement” (2004a, 32). The children witness this confrontation, taking place in Budapest again. Black gangs assume the right to annex a white man’s property. A fierce argument occurs between the black boss and the white owner who insists that he is African too, with rights of citizenship: “This is my fucking country too. My father was born here, I was born here, just like you” (121). While the infuriation of the black boss could be justified in a colonial context, the fact that he acts beyond any official control, deals a blow to the fairness of his cause. In sheer revenge he shouts:

Somebody please tell this white man here that this is not fucking Rhodesia […] Know this bloody colonist […] This is black-man country and the black man is in charge now. Africa for Africans, the boss says in thunderous applause […] The veins of the white man’s neck are like chords, his face dark with anger. But nobody minds him. They are leaving and storming into the house, their chants about Africa for Africans filling the air. (Bulawayo 2013, 120-121)

Bulawayo creates a complicated case of how emotion moves sideways, widening the circle of animosity to include individuals who might be uninvolved in colonial activities. Yet they are treated as responsible for these grievances. This process of anonymous lumping is what Ahmed referred to in her discussion of fear as a border. Bastard, even though he feels the white owner is not to blame, refuses the sympathies Sbho shows for their predicament: “What? Are you crying for the white people? Are they your relatives?” (122). Darling watches and observes, not aware yet that once she crosses the border to America, she will find a similar situation, only in reverse.

America

Crossing the American borders, Darling encounters similar consequences of irrational fear. This occurs when she faces checkup measures at the airport on arrival. Darling is wearing a talisman, a bone to ward off evil in the new land that she brings along with her from her home country. The bone is immediately recognized as a security hazard.
When I got to America the airport dog barked and barked and sniffed me, and the woman in the uniform took me aside and waved the stick around me and the stick made a nting-ting sound and the woman said, Are you carrying any weapons? And I nodded and showed my weapon from Vodloza, and aunt Fostalina said, What is this crap? And she took it off and threw it in a bin. Now I have no weapon to fight evil with in America. (Bulawayo 2013, 152)

Bulawayo deliberately omits the quotation marks that signify dialogue, hence implying absolute elimination of possibilities of mutual recognition or interaction. All cultural and symbolic associations of spiritual protection and guidance, linked to the bone as weapon, are also dismissed before the frantic freaking out that redefines the cultural symbol as a possible tool of aggression. Forced into compulsory acculturation, Darling expresses helpless resignation “Now I have no weapon to fight evil with in America” (Bulawayo 2013, 152).

In her comments on Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, Ahmed discusses an example that Fanon gives of coldness as a symptom of fear. Fanon narrates an encounter between a little white boy and a black slave who is shivering and in need of help. The boy misinterprets the shaking of the black man as a sign of aggression, and he shakes out of fear as well (Ahmed 2004a, 25). Likewise, during her first days in America, Darlings impression of the country is encapsulated in an image of snow:

> What you will see if you come here where I am standing is the snow. Snow on the leafless trees, snow on the cars, snow on the road, snow on the yards, snow on the roofs, just snow covering everything like sand. It is as white as clean teeth, and is also very, very cold. It is a greedy monster too, the snow, because just look how it has swallowed everything… like it wants to kill you. Like it's telling you, with its snow, that you should go back to where you come from. (Bulawayo 201, 150)

Snow is not just a weather condition; it stands for a visible border, a displacement, for an internal fear that Darling entertains as an immigrant. “If I were at home, I know I would not be standing around because something called snow was preventing me from going outside to live life” (155). Snow is an enemy that spots her foreignness. Nostalgic and afraid, she decides never to step
outside the boundaries of her aunt’s house. Darling’s refusal to accept her country of destination is further developed through color imagery. Contemplating the whiteness of a heavy, snowy Detroit sky, Darling declares that “even the stones know that a sky is supposed to be blue” (153). This is an example of prosopopoeia, a literary device that employs concrete, sensory imagery to reflect emotional states (Plett 2012, 52). The image of the blue sky, for example, stands for home, and it is what expresses Darling’s feelings of homesickness. To share knowledge with animated items, the stone in this case, is also a typical emotional bond that Darling frequently establishes with the natural world to convey emotional states that go beyond empirical parameters.

In America, however, Darling encounters borders that are no longer fixed or visible. As Kolossove and Scott put it, borders become “ubiquitous and invisible […] categories of difference that create socio-spatial distinction between places, individuals and groups […] Even a successful crossing of a border may result in the erection of new borders as an individual can become a member of a discriminated minority who has no access to social services and welfare benefits” (Kolossove and Scott 2013, par 36). Apart from the details of being bullied by school peers, Darling’s stay in America is virtually eventless. Realizing that this is America, but not her America, Darling feels confined to an enclosure of silence and fear. Like Bulawayo, who, for more than thirteen years, was unable to return to her home country, Darling does not have American immigration papers. Any travel plans to visit her family are therefore aborted by the fear of not being able to return. Bulawayo employs food imagery to express a nostalgia shrouded in emotional apprehension. Guava is associated with Darling’s childhood experience in her home country. Receiving a smuggled package of guava sent from home, Darling’s first impression is one of anxiety: “if the border people find them, they throw them away. The smell of guava was all over, delicious and dizzying. I closed my eyes and inhaled like I hadn’t breathed in ages” (Bulawayo 2013, 188). Darling soon realizes, however, that the real barrier is emotional “there are times though, that no matter how much food I eat, I find the food does nothing for me, like I am hungry for my country” (155). Darling, who crossed the distant shores because she was tired of the scarcity of food, falls prey to emotion borders that perpetuate a hunger for home.

**Regulated Emotions and Borderland Dialectic**

**Africa**

According to Ahmed, emotions are the product of a certain interpersonal contact, then of an evaluation, or a reading, of this contact. This model
corresponds to theories of emotional appraisal that may suggest proximity or create boundaries that determine who is inside or outside (Ahmed 2004a, 12-13). Highlighting the domains of interpersonal communicative emotions, Anderson and Guerrero propose emotion display rules which refer to “cultural and social factors that regulate how we use emotion cues” (1998, 50). Three of these communication display rules are relevant to my discussion of smiling as a paralinguistic expression of emotion. The first is simulation, which means that you show a feeling when you do not have it; second, inhibition, which means that you suppress a feeling that you have. Finally, the masking display rule refers to feigning a feeling different from what you have (Anderson and Guerrero 1998, 57). Discrepancy between felt and fake smiling is generally registered in psychological emotion studies. Psychologists indicate eighteen different types of smiles, with only six types related to happiness (Niedenthal et al 2010, 417).

The smiles that reflect real happiness are termed Duchenne smiles, while the non-Duchenne smile is a more ambiguous cue that accepts ramified interpretations (Gorvett 2017). Bogodistov and Dost (2017) explain that a Duchenne smile is usually associated with emotional proximity while non-Duchenne smiles indicate emotional/social distance and/or politeness. Morse and Afifi add that non-Duchenne smiles indicate external accommodation, as contrasted with internal assimilation associated with Duchenne smiles (2015, 87). From another perspective, smile in primates is a smile of fear and submissiveness, “a gesture used by low-status individuals to appease more dominant members of the group” (“What Smiling Says”). Smiling in Names portrays a borderland of dialectics and encounters that bears close affinity to the above notions.

In addition to being one of the components of Darling's emotion episode in Africa, smiling provides the frame of her first border encounter. The first smile recorded in the narrative appears behind a “locked gate […] with no keys to open it” (Bulawayo 2013, 8). The gate separates a group of hungry children who “hit Budapest”, searching for food. They meet a smiling British woman, described as “a caged animal” (10), who tells the children, from behind gates, that she is of African origins, and has come from London on a visit. To the children, a smile entails a promise, so “we wait, so we can see what she is smiling for, or at” (8). To their frustration, the woman ironically informs the children she is on diet, throwing off her food “like a dead bird” (9). When the woman brings her camera and asks the children to mechanically fake a smile, saying “cheese”, Darling does not respond. According to national myth, fake smiles could lead to death.
Eventually, however, she abides, thus receiving her first lesson of social mimicry.

The woman points at me, nods, and tells me to say cheeeese and I say it mostly because she is smiling like she knows me really well, like she even knows my mother. I say it slowly at first, and then I say, Cheese and cheese, and everyone is saying cheese … and the camera is clicking and clicking. (11-12)

Realizing that compliance is not to be rewarded, Darling moves from hesitant compliance to explicit rage. Yet, in all these reactions she is confined to the role of follower:

Then Stina, who is quiet most of the time, just starts to walk away … then Bastard starts shouting insults at the woman, and I remember the thing, and that she threw it away without even asking us if we wanted it, and I begin shouting also, and everyone else joins in. We shout and We shout and We shout; we want to eat the thing she was eating; we want to hear our voices soar; we want our hunger to go away.” (11-12)

The first smiling compromise thus fails. The gate remains locked, and the two worlds remain as separate and isolated as ever.

The children, like the adults, are aware of the manipulations, maneuvers and tactics that govern such complicated power relations. The effectiveness of smiling, for example, varies according to context. Smiling is not recommended, for instance, in the presence of the NGO people. It would spoil the impression of poverty they are keen to capture in their photos. “They don’t care that we are embarrassed by our dirt and torn clothing, that we would prefer they didn’t do it, they just take the pictures anyway, take, and take” (54). Smiling is only permitted as a sign of compliance to please the NGO people, and this is what Sis Betty, who accompanies them as a guide, does to conceal her chiding and shouting at the children. Turning with a smiley face to the NGO people is an act of false translation that Betty undertakes to perfect her performance of a typical colonial power relations in which white superiority is sustained by a calculated, though fake, native inferiority.
**America**

Crossing of the American border, both Darling and the collective extradiegetic narrator of “How They Lived” shift from being bewildered at the vacant social performativity of “white” smiles, to that of skilled practitioners of the smiling maneuver. Smiling reveals a calculated congeniality to those deemed higher in social status. For African immigrants, smiling is predominantly of the non-Duchenne type. It conceals fear and submission and becomes the codified reaction that they simulate to avoid any direct conflict.

Darling realizes that smiling stands for decorum rather than happiness: “Now I know that smiling at nothing is really a white people thing” (Bulawayo 2013, 174). In the chapter titled “Wedding”, Darling wonders at the white bride who smiles civilly, but incomprehensively, as she listens to email messages from the African groom’s parents being read aloud in their native language. Through a process of emotion mirroring, Darling learns to give similar smiles: “It is not exactly smile-smile, just the brief baring of teeth. That’s what you do in America you smile at people you don’t know, and you smile at people you don’t even like, and you smile for no reason” (176). For the “illegal” African immigrants facing constant threats of deportation, a controlled smile turns into a defense mechanism: “We heard exporting America, broken borders, invasion, deportation, illegals, illegals, illegals. We bit our tongue till we tasted blood” (244). African immigrants have two options: either to build walls between them and their host country, or to return to their home countries. The collective narrator of “How They Lived” obviously opts for the former:

And when they asked us where we were from, we exchanged glances and smiled with the shyness of child brides. They said, Africa? We nodded yes. What part of Africa? We smiled. Is it that part where vultures wait for famished children to die? We smiled. Where Angelina Jolie got that poor baby girl? We smiled. Where the life expectancy is thirty-five years? We smiled. Is it there, where dissidents shove AK47s between women’s legs? We smiled. Where people run about naked? We smiled. That part where they massacred each other? We smiled. (239)

Repetition of the reply “we smiled” embodies the typical emotion display rule of masking. It also underscores the absurd pretense of having a dialogue. Cultural barriers are constructed according to similar patterns of stereotyping.
Denied legal immigration status, the immigrants are compelled to self-imposed isolation. They accept being in their own “prison”: “We did not want their wrath; we did not want their curiosity. We did not want any attention. We hid our real names, gave false ones when asked. We did not meet stares and we avoided gazes. We built mountains between us and them” (244). The compulsion to exorcise the immigrant demon prevents immigrants from any genuine social integration within their host environment. Conversely, when they recall their memories of home, or encounter a native countryman, physical sensory imagery dominates: “We wanted to put our heads in their mouth to catch every precious word, every feeling” (248). ‘Touching’ words, and ‘catching’ feelings express concrete images of how emotion participates into possible debordering.

Collective Emotions/ Mixed Emotions as Measures of Debordering/Rebordering

Africa

In an article on “Families across Borders”, Silver draws attention to “significant psychological and emotional repercussions of family member migration” (Silver 2014, 194). Correspondingly, Names displays aspects of immigrant family trauma resulting from the absence of a family member. As a child, Darling is indifferent to the long absence of her father and is detached from her busy mother. Through a series of emotional memories, Bulawayo provides details of the circumstances that caused relationships to deteriorate within the family. Darling registers an acute alteration in her emotions towards her father as being parallel to a drastic shift in his emotional condition from caring to anger, particularly after being forced to flee their home. It was therefore easier for Darling, when her father decides to leave to South Africa, to choose to stop thinking of him. Convinced that her parents now represent “just a country that is far away” (66), her defense mechanism is to build a wall. The decision to establish a border of detachment forms her new emotional territory:

Now father is in south Africa, working, but he never writes, never sends us money, never nothing. It makes me angry thinking about him so most of the time I just pretend he doesn’t exist; it’s better this way. (24-25)

Darling conceals the news of her father’s return from her peers, partly because her mother tells her so, but also because she is reluctant to reveal her resentment,
which should be suppressed in a culture that considers overinvolvement as a sign of care. On hearing her father coughing, Darling turns away:

I just stand there, sweating and listening to the cough pounding the walls, pounding and pounding and pounding, and I’m saying in my head, Stop, please stop, stop, stop, stop, stop please, but he keeps pounding and pounding and pounding until I just turn around and slam the door shut. (97)

Again, repetition is the tool employed to indicate emotional crisis, creating an accumulation of sound waves that electrically clash. Darling could not comprehend the traumatic experience her father went through, being broken, humiliated and helpless. All these details are withheld from the reader, and it is only later that the narrator of the interlude titled “How They Lived”, attempts to reveal them. Yet the other children can easily read the situation. Darling is surprised to find out that Bastard, who is usually aggressive and does not trust emotions, is the one who takes the initiative of a communal ritual. It seems that aggressiveness is part of his survival strategy, but it is not his innate nature.

With the help of the other children, Darling engages in a ritual of debordering. Bulawayo uses allusion to religious experience to elaborate on the feeling shared between the dying father and the children. Sboho sings a song about Job with the biblical connotations of suffering illness for a long period of time. Bulawayo embodies the communal feeling not only with the connotations of a similar condition of illness, but also with a ritualistic impact that reconciles the trying time with a need to communicate with God. The need for spiritual support overcomes Darling’s skepticism. The ritual creates a physical proximity that Darling hesitantly tolerates, owing to a fear of being blamed by the others: “I reach out and touch him too because I have never really touched him since he came, and this is what I must do now because how will it look when everybody is touching him and I’m not?” (105). Even though this barrier is crossed, Darling expresses this crossing in images of decay:

We all look at one another and smile-sing because we are touching him, just touching him all over like he is a beautiful plaything we have just rescued from a rubbish bin in Budapest. He feels like dry wood in my hands, but there is a strange light in his sunken eyes, like he has swallowed the sun. (105)
**Emotion as a Border**

This is a love/hate ambivalent emotion that is more recognized in non-European cultures. Darling’s love/hate emotion is stirred by a sense of betrayal and an imbalance of equity of emotions. She loved her father dearly, but eventually she suppresses her feelings and decides to move ahead. Total debordering is therefore out of reach.

**America**

In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa marks a complicated case of emotional ambivalence as characteristic of the experience of border crossing (1987, 113). Anzaldúa explains that, as time passes, the immigrant feels torn between nostalgia on the one hand, and inevitable detachment on the other. Time lapsing consolidates borders as it weakens emotional attachment:

I left and have been gone a long time.  
I keep leaving and when I am home  
they remember no one but me had ever left.  
I listen to the *grillos* more intently  
than I do their *reganos*.  
I have more languages than they,  
am aware of every root of my *pueblo*;  
they, my people, are not.  
They are the living, sleeping roots. (Anzaldúa 1987, 113)

Through olfactory imagery, Darling expresses a similar pain that accompanies her as an immigrant: “I am remembering the taste of all these things, but remembering is not tasting, and it is painful” (211). As a consequence of crossing the borders, remembering becomes the opposite of tasting, emotional proximity is replaced with abstract memories. Darling craves for home, and yet she is emotionally drained by the fact that her family at home does not understand her suffering. Even though they incessantly request financial support, they do not offer any emotional gratification to alleviate the immigrant’s homesickness. In a symbolic gesture, Darling deliberately hangs off a phone conversation with her mother and friends, thus marking her eventual consolidation of this ambivalent border space.

In America, Darling thus oscillates between two zones of feeling: “If I were standing outside of myself and saw this face I would maybe say, who is that? But at the same time, it also looks interesting and I’m happy with it” (167). In other words, Darling realizes that she has to accommodate cultural assimilation.
as the sole path to fit in. She must find a way for the coexistence of African blue sky with America’s white sky. The clearest effort in that direction relates to her language acquisition. Darling understands that to be admitted in the American ingroup, she must sound like them. She recognizes that language is a border “like a huge iron door and you are always losing your key” (199). Being inarticulate means that you remain imprisoned in the category of the outsider. This pertains basically to the first generation of immigrants who tried, but poorly adapted to life in their country of destination. As she witnesses the embarrassing frustration of her aunt because of her imperfect accent, Darling is resolutely determined to avoid similar experiences: “I promise myself I’ll never ever sound like that” (199).

Darling soon engages in a relentless emotion work to regulate her feelings in accordance with what is culturally accepted. She gradually equates being American with being able to master the American accent. This is a conviction that is reflected in how she evaluates the credentials of her friend Kristel as an immigrant: “The truth is she can’t even write a sentence correctly in English to show that she is indeed American” (201). Fervently determined to adapt, Darling imitates the accent of TV series and “have[ing] my list of American words that I kept under my tongue like talisman” to avoid a feeling of non-belonging (196). Fischer et al classify this phenomenon as emotional assimilation, mentioning that it “involves contagious acts of mimicry that automatically mimic and synchronize movements, expressions, postures and vocalizations with those of another person” (199). As a consequence, Darling gets more and more detached from her home bonds. She gradually stops writing letters to her friends at home, feeling no longer able to share or communicate.

**Conclusion**

Collectively, Ahmed’s affect theory, Anzaldua’s concept of border crossing, and Konrad’s theory of debordering serve as an applicable frame for evaluating the border experience depicted in Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*. Through a combination of emotion episodes and emotion appraisals, Bulawayo explains how emotion constructs borders, whether perceived as concrete barriers or as unsurmountable psychological distance. As expellees and/or illegal immigrants, the narrators of Bulawayo’s text are conscious of self-imposed borders that surround their threatened residence in America, but they are also aware of the emotional borders that separate them from a home they cannot return to. In terms of interpersonal emotions polarity, Bulawayo interprets the border experience through imagery that involves fear, hate, and anger. Subtle facial expressions are
Emotion as a Border

often employed to convey how it feels to be in need to maintain, negotiate, or manipulate borders. Bulawayo also offers a range of interactive of borderland dialectics including a) smiling as a regulatory expression of emotions b) ambivalent of mixed emotions associated with patterns of debordering and rebordering, and c) collective emotion imagery of the newly established transnational immigrant community. Reflecting a cross-cultural understanding of displacement, We Need New Names redefines the experience of borders predominantly through emotion relations.

Works Cited
<https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-22-2_79-117>.
<https://www.dw.com/en/zimbabwean-author-noviolet-bulawayo-i-like-to-write-from-the-bone/a-18572543?fbclid=IwAR2w8-Z4oyCm2IatyD-6v_wIY7M4nN2sU3NhMx0Ca_-unw5h58BjMRehdo>.


Moji, Belinda. 2015. “New Names, Translational Subjectivities: (Dis)location and (Re)naming in NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*.” *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 27, no.2: 181-190.


DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X10000865>.


They’re Just Like Everybody Else:
A Postcolonial Reading of Rohina Malik’s *Yasmina’s Necklace*

*Ingý Hassan*

“In a world of color prejudice … the myth of mass inferiority of most men [has] built a wall which many centuries will not break down.”
W.E.B. Du Bois (1925, 407)

Contemporary American-Pakistani playwright, actress, and educator Rohina Malik is an artist whose drama is heavily engaged in an issue that occupies centre stage in the lives of minorities, namely stereotyping, together with the problematics of discrimination, identity crisis, resistance, and the different forms of attachment to/detachment from the motherland. In her drama, she challenges stereotyping through portraying its painful impact and presenting an alternative image of Arabs and Muslims as ordinary human beings with ordinary strengths, weaknesses, and aspirations. In an interview with Dana Lynn Formby, Malik sheds light on the influence of stereotyping on the presentation of Muslims in the media:

I’m really concerned about the portrayal of Muslims in our media […] It concerns me to see Muslims frequently represented as the villain, the terrorist, somebody who’s plotting something evil. Rarely do we see Muslims as ordinary human beings, and that’s so dangerous […] I, as a Muslim playwright, can tell stories where Muslims are just normal people like everybody else. I’m hoping that things begin to change with time. (Formby 2017, para. 2)

In another interview, Malik points to the intended message of her play *Yasmina’s Necklace*, namely putting to question the popular stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims:

* Lecturer in the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University.
*Cairo Studies in English* – 2020(2): https://cse.journals.ekb.eg/
I wrote the play because I’m very disturbed that, when you see Muslim characters, we are never regular people […] So I was hoping the play could take audiences into two living rooms of two normal, regular Muslim families, Yasmina’s family and Sam’s family. They’re not perfect people; they’re human. They’re just like everybody else, with their faults and their contradictions. (Belanger 2017, para. 3-4)

Malik’s *Yasmina’s Necklace* dramatises the life of two Muslim families living in Chicago: the first is that of Ali, an Iraqi immigrant, Sara, his Puerto Rican Muslim wife, and their son, Abdul Samee, who has changed his name to Sam. The second is an Iraqi refugee family new to Chicago; this family consists of Musa and his only daughter, Yasmina – called Yasu by people close to her. Musa and Yasmina fled Iraq after the death of Yasmina’s mother because of the war. Yasmina’s and Sam’s parents get them introduced to each other, hoping to help them get married and have a settled family life. As love develops between Yasmina and Sam, they unfold their innermost thoughts, feelings, fears, and sufferings, bringing stereotyping to the fore as the central issue in their experiences.

First published in 2016, *Yasmina’s Necklace* was received with much critical acclaim; most interviews and magazine reviews focused mainly on Malik’s attack on stereotypes created about immigrants and refugees, especially Arabs and Muslims. This article seeks to contribute to the critique on *Yasmina’s Necklace* by attempting a postcolonial reading of the play, with particular focus on W. E. B. Du Bois and Edward Said. Various concepts at the core of postcolonial theory, such as othering, stereotyping, resistance, exile and the relation towards homeland, among many others, are tackled in the play. Analysing the play in the light of these concepts as presented by Du Bois and Said aims at presenting a deeper understanding of the text and the issues it addresses. Foucault’s concept of the relationship between power and knowledge will also be drawn upon to inform an interpretation of the process of creating as well as promoting stereotypes, a process which builds borders that come to engulf the lives of minorities.

Although Du Bois’ views focus on the suffering of African Americans under the yoke of racial segregation, and their struggle to attain their social and economic rights at the turn of the twentieth century, his ideas hold true of the
challenges faced by Arabs and Muslims as minority groups in contemporary American society.

Du Bois’ social philosophy anticipated postcolonial theory while diagnosing the Negro Problem and exposing the superior race/inferior race dichotomy which was later developed by Edward Said. In his essay “Of the Dawn of Freedom,” Du Bois analyses the African American strife, attributing it to racial prejudice: “The PROBLEM OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY is the problem of the color-line,—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea” ([1903] 1994b, 9). Later, in his essay “The Negro Mind Reaches Out,” he criticises

the curious, most childish propaganda [which] dominates us, by which good, earnest, and even intelligent men have come by millions to believe almost religiously that white folk are a peculiar and chosen people whose one great accomplishment is civilization and that civilization must be protected from the rest of the world. (Du Bois 1925, 407)

Du Bois’ statement depicts racial prejudice as the product of a discriminatory ideology that was nourished until it became regarded as an indisputable belief, a truth. Hence, there is a compelling relationship between his philosophy and Foucault’s theory of knowledge structures created by power and the shaping of those power relations. Foucault (1977) reads history as a “form of a war … relations of power” (114) and relates the mechanisms of power to “the effects of truth that this power produces and transmits, and which in their turn reproduce this power” (93). It will be illustrated in the analysis that these concepts are inseparable from the experience of stereotyping as one where bias is created by specific knowledge forms shaped by power to ensure its grip on its objects.

In his essay “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” Du Bois first coined the term “double-consciousness” defining it as “a peculiar sensation … this 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 him in amused contempt and pity” ([1903] 1994a, 2). He further describes the pain which such an experience causes; he writes: “One ever feels his two-ness … two souls, two thoughts, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (2). For Du Bois, double-consciousness is at the core of the psychological experience of the African American, living “in this American world, —a world which yields him no true
self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world” (2). Regarded as a “poor race,” Du Bois continues, the African American is denied his social and economic rights (5). Exploring how, in the process of challenging racism, the racially segregated can overcome this “peculiar sensation” that he describes, Du Bois claims:

To the tired climbers, the horizon was ever dark … the journey at least gave leisure for reflection and self-examination; it changed the child of Emancipation to the youth with dawning self-consciousness, self-realization, self-respect. In those somber forests of his striving his own soul rose before him … he saw in himself some faint revelation of his power, of his mission. He began to have a dim feeling that, to attain his place in the world, he must be himself, and not another. (5)

That is, in such a dismal experience of prejudice and humiliation, it becomes a necessity for the oppressed not to lose sense of his/her true self. It is only by believing in and being himself/herself that he/she can prosper and earn self-respect as well as the respect of the world around him/her.

In the play, Sam and Yasmina represent this experience, though each dramatises it in a different way. The following lines will present an analysis of their experience in the light of this Du Boisian theory. Sam exists at this interstice between the American culture and his original heritage, which makes the Du Boisian concept of double-consciousness enlightening of his experience. In their first encounter, when Yasmina asks him about his heritage, he replies “salad,” referring to his Latino Arab Muslim family background (Malik 2016, 31). In his second encounter with Yasmina, he explicitly describes his feeling of being not fully embraced in any of these cultures: “When I’m with my dad’s family, I’m not Arab enough. When I’m with my mom’s family, I’m not Puerto Rican enough. High school sucked. I was never American enough” (44). This complex identity continues to influence Sam’s personal life. When his parents talk to him about Yasmina, he replies: “I can’t marry a girl from Iraq … they have a completely different mentality, it would never work. I’m an American, and I need to marry an American” (19). However, ironically, Sam had already been married to a non-Muslim American and his marriage ended in divorce; while the marriage ended due to “some infidelity on her part,” as Sam tells Yasmina, he admits that before that, the couple had “stopped communicating” (47). His words portray this relationship as one which was based on love, yet lacking an element.
which is crucial to its success, namely a shared background. Sam manifests double-consciousness and the torment it causes. Seeing his identity through the different cultural lenses he is examined by, it seems to him that his identity is a combination of various components which seem irreconcilable in certain situations. At the outset of the play, when his parents fail to convince him to “try [their] way of doing things,” he bursts in frustration: “I was born in the wrong family. Wrong name, wrong culture, wrong everything!” (13).

Nevertheless, it would be an oversimplification to see Sam as a person who looks at his culture and his religion with contempt and wants to dissociate himself from them. In fact, Sam is suffering because he clings to his culture with complete awareness that this presents an obstacle in his life. Examined closely in the context of Sam’s portrayal in the whole play, Sam’s previous statement discloses a situation more complex than its immediate meaning. “I know who I am” (14) as he confirms in the same scene, and later, in his first meeting with Yasmina he asserts, “I do value my culture” (32). However, he immediately describes his dilemma explicitly through adding: “but I also want to succeed” (32; italics mine). This reflects Sam’s awareness of the complexity of his situation. His statement exposes a juxtaposition which exists between his ethnicity and his prospect for success in the society he lives in, another manifestation of Du Bois’ elaboration on African American double-consciousness: “In this merging [the African American] he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost … He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellow, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face” (Du Bois [1903] 1994a, 2-3; italics mine).

This is precisely what Sam is going through; he wants to be recognized as a Muslim and an American, to be treated as an equal. Nevertheless, in many situations, he is rejected based on his ethnic background. He, along with other members of his community as we know from the play, namely Osama, Saddam, and Muhammad, face this problem of labeling: “The moment I open my mouth and say my name, I’m put into a box,” Sam explains to Yasmina (Malik 2016, 32). To his disappointment, “Every resume that had [his] name on it was ignored. So, [he] did an experiment. [He] changed [his] name, resent [his] resume and boom, instant responses from top companies. [He] got a position that hundreds of people applied for” (32). That is why he changed his name or rather, “had to” change it, as he emphasizes (11).

Thus, it can be tenably argued that by calling his family, his name and his culture “wrong,” Sam is expressing the perspective of the society rather than his
Ingy Hassan

own (13). He is not trying to dissociate himself from his heritage, yet, at the same time, he is aware that it is not uncommon for many in the society to look to his community with some skepticism and, consequently, deny him privileges granted to others of different backgrounds. This makes him feel trapped in this unjust classification. He, therefore, decides to take the only course of action which he believes can help him get his right, a good job that he is qualified for. He changes his name so as to conceal his identity in the corporate world.

Exposed to racial prejudice, denied his rights, and aware of his image as inferior in the eyes of the Other, Sam’s character carries the main elements that shape the African American experience according to Du Bois’ concept of double-consciousness. Yet, Sam’s way of handling this situation marks a departure from the African American model Du Bois portrays. Sam does not fall in the trap of “measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on him in amused contempt and pity” (Du Bois [1903] 1994a, 2). As previously mentioned, Sam does not lose sight of his identity or lose his pride in his culture of origin. At the same time, he does not have enough courage to face the world with his identity. What he resorts to is a kind of manipulation or deception, and he is aware of that. “I know who I have to be to the outside world,” he says to Yasmina (Malik 2016, 64). Sam sees life as a game he has to play, and he believes that if he does not follow the rules of this game, he will end as a loser. He tells Yasmina that he believes he knows “how to play the game” and is ready to do “whatever it takes to succeed” (33). He is totally convinced that racial bias is real: “White people will always get a large slice of the American pie, with ice cream and a cherry on top. Minorities, well, let’s be real. Crumbs were created for the people of color” (33). His tone is bitter, as his words imply being driven to that course of action where he avoids segregation by hiding behind a name that is “easier,” and indeed, it has made his life easier in the corporate world (32).

Seen in this light and closely examined from a postcolonial perspective, Sam’s experience of double-consciousness manifests the ambivalence in the power relation between the coloniser and the colonised, as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2007) put it:

The problem for colonial discourse is that it wants to produce compliant subjects who reproduce its assumptions, habits and values – that is, ‘mimic’ the colonizer. But instead it produces ambivalent subjects whose mimicry is never very far from mockery. Ambivalence describes this fluctuating relationship between
mimicry and mockery, an ambivalence that is fundamentally unsettling to colonial dominance. In this respect, it is not necessarily disempowering for the colonial subject; but rather can be seen to be *ambi-valent* or ‘two-powered’. The effect of this ambivalence (the simultaneous attraction and repulsion) is to produce a profound disturbance of the authority of colonial discourse. (10)

In fact, rather than impersonating the Other as an act of compliance, Sam takes on a “very white” name as a way of challenging authority (Malik 2016, 32). In other words, Sam makes himself, seemingly, blend in the Other, not to “reproduce its assumptions, habits and values,” but, on the contrary, to defy these values and violate rules based on biased discourse and, finally, undermine the Other’s authority and attain his right which he has been denied (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2007, 10). His “mimicry” of the name here becomes an act of resistance and ridicule against preconceived ideas, a way to reverse the rules of the game to his own advantage.

On the other hand, Yasmina stands in for the next stage in Du Bois’ theory of double consciousness where the oppressed figure acquires emotional maturity, realizing its worth and becoming itself. When Yasmina says “I want people to know where I’m from” (Malik 2016, 29), not only does she proudly embrace her heritage, reflect “self-consciousness” and “self-respect” (Du Bois [1903] 1994a, 5), but—as opposed to Sam—she also shows courage and determination to face the world with her identity. Here comes the significance of the play’s title. Yasmina always wears a necklace with a pendant in the shape of Iraq with “IRAQ” inscribed on it. Sam is surprised that she has “guts to wear that necklace, in these times,” and sees this as a “political statement” that is likely to expose her to trouble “with all the madness in the world today,” believing that “people are ignorant” (Malik 2016, 29). Yet, Yasmina is ready to face any possible consequences: “if something happened, I could handle it,” she replies (29). This implies the lack of truth in the preconceived ideas about her country, and her confidence in the fact that when people’s eyes are opened to the truth about this part of the world, there will be no room for prejudice.

Interestingly, this ignorance which restrains Sam from revealing his background in public in fear of being mistreated is the same reason that urges Yasmina to show her religious and cultural identity. It is suggested that Yasmina feels she has a duty to fulfill, namely, to illuminate the Other about her country of origin and her culture, and, consequently, correct the false ideas about her homeland. An instance of such preconceived ideas about the Arab World is
shown in the situation Yasmina narrates to Sam. She tells him she has met a
woman at the grocery store where she works as a cashier. When the woman saw
Yasmina’s necklace, she burst, “How can you be proud of being from that shit
country. You are all a bunch of terrorists … Get back on your camel, and go
back to I-raq” (29). Yasmina reveals her surprise as to the ignorance of the Other
and throws light on the false image people have about her country: “It’s funny.
Iraq was known for having the most educated women. Now it’s known for
violence” (30).

Yasmina’s family too suffers directly as a result of this prejudiced image. Her
father used to be “a professional. People respected [him]. [He] was the best
dentist in [their] neighborhood and everybody knew it!” (16). Now, he has no
job and no prospect of being hired because of this prejudice which is a result of
ignorance. “Nobody will hire me! The way they look at me, as if I’m some dirty
terrorist,” he says to his daughter (15). Yasmina feels responsible for changing
this image of Iraq as violent and backward, and she embraces this duty through
always proudly showing her heritage. Immigration for her – though not
voluntary, as she is a refugee whose father left his homeland because he “had no
choice” – becomes a way of bridging the gap between two worlds through
informing the Other about the truth of her ethnic heritage (23). It is as if she
crosses physical borders to eliminate religious and cultural prejudice.

Yasmina’s way of dealing with prejudice is similar to the African American
model of reacting to racial discrimination according to Du Bois ([1903] 1994a):
“he saw in himself some faint revelation of his power, of his mission. He began
to have a dim feeling that, ‘to attain his place in the world, he must be himself,
and not another’” (5; italics mine). Indeed, Yasmina believes in one’s awareness
of who he/she really is and in the assertion of one’s identity as the shields that
protect him/her through life’s turmoil. She believes in her mother’s notion that
“people with no roots allow others to define them, because they don’t know who
they are, where they are going, or where they come from” and that, as such, they
are similar to “the wicked tree, whose roots are weak, so weak that any storm
can blow you away” (Malik 2016, 48). In contrast, Yasmina is determined to be
“like the goodly tree [whose] branches reach high towards the heavens. No
storm, no matter how violent, can uproot [it because its] roots are deep,
established firmly in the earth” (48). This is not to say, however, that trying to
be oneself in the context of bias is an easy course of action for the oppressed.
Despite Yasmina’s strength, there are times along the play’s course of action
where her emotional vulnerability comes to the surface. Feeling rejected because
of her ethnic background, she sometimes sees it impossible to cross the border
of prejudice and loses hope in any change. For instance, she says to Sam “I’m a tree who has been uprooted and placed in a strange land. I can’t grow here, and every day I die a little bit more” (80). Yet, she resumes the battle against bias. She never loses sight of her goal; she is able to quickly regain her belief in herself. “I’m strong! I survived!” she says in the same scene (80).

Drawing upon Foucault and Said gives more insight into understanding this fluctuation in Yasmina’s position. In Power/Knowledge (1977), Foucault describes a power relation as “an unequal and relatively stable relation of forces” (200) which is “structured essentially round a certain number of great prohibition functions” (122). Seen in this light, Yasmina is an object of power struggling against preconceived ideas about her ethnicity. Being indoctrinated in the consciousness of a considerable part of the society, these ideas have become too steady to change and, also, powerful enough to enforce restrictions that constrain the lives of those who are prejudiced against. This power relation involved in the concept of stereotyping determines the extent to which the object of power can achieve his/her goal. In his article “On Lost Causes,” Said defines the phrase “a lost cause” as “something you support or believe in that can no longer be believed in except as something without hope of achievement” (Said [2000] 2013a, 487). This definition implies a power relation where power dominates ideology and controls its outcome. Said’s definition describes Yasmina’s situation; she believes in the necessity of changing the popular stereotypes about her community. Yet, there are times when this goal seems impossible to achieve because the society’s narrative of power typically determines the loss of the weaker side’s cause (Said [2000] 2013a, 487). That is, being the object of power, Yasmina seems unlikely to attain her goal of changing the preconceived ideas undermining her culture.

Foucault and Said proceed with their theories, adding the idea of resistance which, conversely, explains Yasmina’s resilience. Foucault states that “there are no relations of power without resistances” (1977, 142). As an object of power, Yasmina shows resistance and her dilemma lies in the fact that the goal she strives to achieve involves “subversive recodifications of power relations,” that is, disruption in the power relation where she is the weaker side subjected to racial prejudice (Foucault 1977, 123). The strength she regains can be elucidated by Said’s argument that whether a cause is lost or not depends on judgement rather than an objective situation (Said [2000] 2013a, 487). Yasmina fights stereotyping attempting to assert herself through her identity, thus an individual worthy of recognition and respect. Had she succumbed to the objective view of her situation, she would have seen “the survival only of powerful nations and
peoples” (487). Her position, however, is based on her judgement, on believing in the legitimacy of challenging and changing stereotypes, regardless of the challenges which hinder her from reaching her goal. It is this judgement which gives her strength.

Yasmina believes in firmly adhering to her identity as the only way for change because hiding her identity implies being ashamed of it, which in turn helps reinforce the negative image propagated about her homeland. This is expressed in her first encounter with Sam. When she knows that he has changed his name, she calls him “phony” (Malik 2016, 34), and later explains, “by changing your name, you are denying your culture” (38). Yasmina sees this attitude of giving in to white supremacy as integral in enhancing it. She makes this clear when she tells Sam, “Because of people like you! You’re the reason nothing changes” (33). That is, what Sam sees as success is, in fact, a defeat in her eyes. Having “watched [her] culture and history slip through [her] fingers,” Yasmina is completely aware of the danger this poses (38). She warns Sam that “the storm is coming,” and advises him, “Begin with your name” (48). In other words, to her, this danger means the loss of identity which is the beginning of a complete fall, and she does not accept that fate. She is resolved to preserve her culture and put an end to racial prejudice by being true to her heritage.

Malik’s characters suffer from “the standardization and cultural stereotyping [which] have intensified the hold of the nineteenth-century … imaginative demonology of ‘the mysterious Orient” (Said 1978, 26). The way the lady at the grocery store insults Yasmina is nothing but the reflection of the “contemporary Orientalist attitudes [that] flood the press and the popular mind. Arabs, for example are thought of as camel-riding, terroristic, hook-nosed, venal lechers whose underserved wealth is an affront to real civilization,” (108) as “the embodiment of incompetence” (287). Yasmina’s challenge of this prejudiced image of her culture makes her the dramatic mouthpiece of Malik who says “To me, writing this play was that hammer to smash those stereotypes” (Belanger 2017, para. 5). When Yasmina says to Sam, “I speak with an accent, but I don’t think with an accent” (Malik 2016, 39), she is implicitly suggesting that not having the physical features of the people of the “superior” West does not make her “aberrant, undeveloped, [or] inferior” (Said 1978, 300). With her reasoning, courage, and intellectual independence, Yasmina is, thus, destabilizing the Orientalist “ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority” (42).

As pointed out earlier, stereotyping and its resultant racial prejudice are inseparable from a kind of ignorance, an idea that lends itself to one of Said’s
main arguments about the “general relationship between culture and empire” which he elucidates in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994, xi). In *Yasmina’s Necklace*, when Sam refers to racists as ignorant, he implies that stereotypes about the people of “other” places is the result of the obscure knowledge the West has about “the mysterious East,” “the distant lands and peoples” (xi). However, based on Said’s assertion in his introduction to *Orientalism* that “men make their own history, … [and that] what they can know is what they have made” (1978, 50), this ignorance, this stereotyping, acquires an additional level of interpretation that is best informed by Said’s concept of Orientalism and Foucault’s view of the power-knowledge relation. Said’s statement suggests that the stereotypes which form the knowledge of the Western world about the East are products of the former’s mind. Seen from a postcolonial perspective, this process of stereotyping is essential for maintaining the Orientalist dichotomy of “‘We’ are this, ‘they’ are that” (237). Therefore, this biased idea does not exist out of the lack of knowledge or information.

In fact, examined in the light of Foucault’s power/knowledge theory, it can be argued that this bias represents a specific knowledge structure that has been created by power and has later become popularly adopted as unquestionable. Foucault uses the word “truth” to refer to this kind of knowledge, stating that this truth “is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power” (1977, 131). In other words, truth is attached to the knowledge produced by power, and it is through these knowledge structures or schemes that power sustains itself. This confirms Said’s idea about the “unbroken arc of knowledge and power [that] connects the European or Western statesman and the Western Orientalists; it forms the rim of the stage containing the Orient” (1978, 104). Thus, to use Said’s words, “His [the Orientalist’s] Orient is not the Orient as it is, but the Orient as it has been Orientalized” (104). Worthy of note here is that it is necessary to distinguish between the creator of knowledge and the recipient, that is power and those who adopt the knowledge it creates. In *Yasmina’s Necklace*, Sam and Yasmina become victims of a knowledge scheme that stereotypes them and makes them rejected even prior to knowing them. This suggests the dispersal of power and, therefore, knowledge, a central idea in Foucault’s thought. To illustrate, racial discourse with its preconceived ideas about Arabs and Muslims as backward and violent influences Sam and Yasmina through individuals who have received it and eventually adopted it as the knowledge structure accepted and supported by power.
Although in relation to Sam and Yasmina those who reject them show as victimisers, those victimisers can simultaneously be seen as victims, as objects of power. Having a certain structure of knowledge imposed on them through being established as irrefutable, they are ripped of their independent reasoning and pushed into blindly conforming to that knowledge characterised by “human detachment” and “absence of sympathy” (Said 1978, 104). Thus, the recipients of knowledge, in Yasmina’s Necklace, are intellectually and emotionally coerced. It can be argued, therefore, that the dehumanising effect of racial discourse, of the ideology which Said refers to as “the web of racism, cultural stereotypes, political imperialism, dehumanizing ideology,” extends to include both the subject and the object of racism (Said 1978, 27). In this context of dehumanised individuals following an ideology of whose truth they are ignorant, Yasmina’s determination and her attempt to change this knowledge, these stereotypes, become a mission toward enlightening the Other. This is a subversion of the Orientalist notions about “bringing civilization to primitive or barbaric peoples” (Said 1994, xi), with the object of racism—Yasmina—bringing the truth about her homeland to the minds of those whom truth has been obscured by biases and stereotypes. Yasmina is resolved to be true to the promise she had made to Amir, her lover and childhood friend, before she left Baghdad. In the last memory scene in Yasmina’s Necklace, we see Amir telling her: “tell them our story, tell the world who we are. (He cries.) Tell them we are human beings! Tell them we just want clean water to drink, we want peace, we want to marry our childhood sweethearts. Tell them, Yasu. Tell them we are human beings!” (Malik 2016, 78). This subtle reversal of the Orientalist roles of those who are racially prejudiced against as ignorant and the racist as enlightening powerfully contributes to Rohina Malik’s purpose of shattering stereotypes.

Central to Edward Said’s thought as well as in Yasmina’s Necklace is the motif of exile and the relationship between the exiled and his/her homeland. In his essay “Reflections on Exile,” Said maintains that attachment to one’s homeland is at the core of the experience of exile: “Exile is predicated on the existence of, love for, and bond with, one’s native place; what is true of all exile is not that home and love of home are lost, but that loss is inherent in the very existence of both” (Said [2000] 2013b, 190). Yasmina is a refugee, a person who unwillingly leaves her homeland. “I never wanted to leave Baghdad,” she says in more than one instance in the play (Malik 2016, 33; 41). Her homeland always exists in her heart, her memories, and her art. When Sam asks her what she is painting, she answers, “Baghdad. Always, Baghdad” (52). Brokenhearted as she is, Yasmina is far from weak. Her love for and attachment to her homeland are
not only the reasons of her agony; they are also the very sources of her strength. “Yasmina draws her strength from her homeland, which is never far from her mind” (Friswold 2017, para. 8). Friswold’s statement is compelling; Yasmina’s attachment to Iraq as empowering her shows in her pride of her identity, being a prolific artist who is always inspired by her native place, and in her plan to start an organization to help refugees. Thus, while away, her native country is still the driving force behind everything she does.

In “On Lost Causes,” Said further elaborates on the experience of separation from one’s native country, highlighting the effect of the bond to one’s homeland on the exiled person’s life in the new land:

Every culture that I know of emphasizes [...] the idea that there is more to life than doing well: the “higher things” for which everyone is taught to strive are loyalty to the cause of nation, service to others, service to God, family, and tradition. All are components of the national identity. To rise in the world, that motif of self-help and personal betterment, is routinely attached to the good of the community and the improvement of one’s people. ([2000] 2013a, 489)

This holds true of both Yasmina and Sam. In her first encounter with Sam, Yasmina emphasizes the importance of being true to one’s national identity, seeing this as a higher cause in life that should be placed ahead of all other goals. In explicit contempt of Sam’s changing his name, she tells him, “You deny your heritage. And for what? To have a fat wallet?” (Malik 2016, 33). With her powerful attachment to her country guiding her life, Yasmina’s actions can be understood as manifestations of her “loyalty to the cause of nation, service to others, service to God, family, and tradition” (Said [2000] 2013a, 489). In addition to verbally expressing her pride in her national identity, Yasmina symbolically reflects this pride by wearing her necklace, giving voice to the sorrow and suffering of her people through her art, and trying to help refugees through the organization she is starting. All these actions dramatise her unbreakable bond with her homeland and the idea that her own life and “the good of the community” have coalesced (489). Yasmina manifests Amir’s statement that “That land [Iraq] is a part of you. It’s in your blood” (Malik 2016, 39), and fulfills his will: “always stay connected to it” (33). It is particularly significant that Yasmina believes that contributing to “the improvement of one’s people” is a responsibility she eagerly and happily embraces (Said [2000] 2013a, 489).
After she and her father were settled down in Chicago, she tells Sam, she “knew that the best way to thank Allah, was to help other refugees” (Malik 2016, 31). In other words, rather than being detached from her native community, Yasmina develops more sympathy and a stronger bond with her community through being forced to leave her homeland.

The vigour Yasmina acquires through this attachment to her homeland extends beyond her, she inspires others with the same strength. A substantial change is noticed in Sam’s attitude toward showing loyalty to his Arab identity after he knows Yasmina. In the past, he did not have the courage to assert his identity in public. He tells Yasmina:

I’ll never forget the first day of the invasion […] I went out with my friends to a bar. I just wanted to forget about what was happening. In the bar, the news was on, and one of my “friends” who knows my Dad’s Iraqi, started to cheer with everyone else as we watched Baghdad get bombed […] I wanted to just scream at him and pound his face. But I didn’t. I didn’t say or do anything. Here was my dad’s family hiding in a mosque, trying to survive the bombs, while I was in a bar watching people celebrate. And I did nothing. It just made me feel like shit. (46)

It is true that Sam has been to Baghdad only once long ago as a child, yet he still retains his bond in it even in this situation where he did not stand up to his friends’ disregard of the destruction of his homeland. The mere fact that he felt guilty for being passive before the humiliation of his native country implies his attachment to it. Later, after he knows Yasmina, he starts to take practical steps toward expressing this attachment. For instance, he connects her to a lawyer who can help her with starting the refugee-help organization. Later, this change in Sam becomes more explicit. In drastic contrast to his previous concern regarding Yasmina’s wearing her Iraq necklace, at the end of the play, he tells her “I want you to wear your necklace, it’s a part of you. Iraq was your past” (80). Thus, Sam starts to believe in one’s right to uphold one’s heritage and show pride in it in the face of the Other, regardless of the latter’s view of him.

Yasmina’s Necklace, thus, contributes to portraying the image of the American society as being “at the forefront in dealing with issues of ethnic interface” (Kim 1995, 347). Set in post-September 11 American society, the play depicts the lives of Arab characters struggling with the negative dogmatic image ascribed to them by stereotypes that were created and elevated to the level of the
A Postcolonial Reading

sacred by an extremist ideology. Double-consciousness becomes an inevitable outcome in such a situation where a person is aware of being looked to with skepticism due to his/her ethnicity. It has been the purpose of this study to explore this experience as dramatised in Rohina Malik’s *Yasmina’s Necklace* from a postcolonial perspective. With the concept of othering and the superior/inferior dichotomy at its core, postcolonial theory significantly informs a critique of this text, as the characters’ relationship to the society they live in comprises several elements characteristic of a typical coloniser-colonised relationship. The ways the two main characters react to the experience of double-consciousness represent different modes of dealing with racial prejudice; yet, at the end, those two modes converge to reveal being true to one’s roots as a precondition for self-realization and self-respect.

**Works Cited**


Indian-American Identity Negotiation: Placing the Self in Domestic and Public Spaces

Marwa Fawzy*

Introduction

Numerous attempts have been made at explicating the concept of ‘identity’ and studying the processes of identity construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction. These attempts are particularly significant in delineating the impact of displacement on transnational figures. When Vijay Mishra said: “All diasporas are unhappy, but every diaspora is unhappy in its own way” (2007, 1), he was referring to those people whose exploration of their identities in diaspora has placed them in an ambivalent position with regard to the meaning of their hyphenated identities and their need for a community. The same sad connotations were expressed by Edward Said in his “Reflections on Exile,” where he described the experience of displacement or exile as one of sadness that cannot be defeated; even representations of the relatively successful “episodes in an exile’s life […] are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement” (2013, 173). Though there are clear distinctions between diaspora, exile, and immigration, they all share the basic experience of dislocation and being cut from one’s roots for a significant period of time.

In order to attain a nearly comprehensive understanding of such migrant/diasporic identities, a survey of ‘identity’ perceptions is in order. For Stuart Hall, identity is “a process of understanding – ‘What we have become’ rather than determining ‘what we really are’” (1990, 225). In other words, the understanding of the self involves analyzing the factors that have left their marks on one’s identity, especially the temporal factor. This view undervalues the importance of place as a determining factor of one’s identity, a perception that is shared by Paul Gilroy who argues that identity “should not only be viewed in relation to one’s birthplace or – roots; identity is a work in progress gradually

* Assistant Lecturer in English, The British University in Egypt (BUE). This paper is derived from the author’s unpublished M.A. thesis entitled “Indian Diaspora and Identity Transformation in Selected Indian American Novels by Kiran Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, and Jhumpa Lahiri” (Cairo University 2017).

Cairo Studies in English – 2020(2): https://cse.journals.ekb.eg/
determined by one’s—routes” (1993, 19). Clearly, Gilroy allocates paramount importance to one’s journey or course of action as indicative of the dynamic nature of identity, which can hardly be explained in relation to one’s origins.

Furthermore, for other scholars, identity is a performance rather than a rigid state of sameness. For instance, in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman compares people’s expression of their identity in front of others to a performance where the audience “are asked to believe that the character they see [...] possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it” (1956, 10). In other words, identity is what one says and does, and by changing one’s speech and behaviors, identities are likely to transform. This dynamic view entails that in order for the performance to happen, the audience should be willing to accept its reality.

Thus, this concept of identity as performance is comparable to Hall’s ‘enunciation’ of the self where he asserts that “what we say is always ‘in context,’ positioned” (222). The speaker or writer uses the first-person pronoun ‘I’ to place himself/herself in a certain contextual background without which the identity can hardly be represented. The view that one’s place and identity are interlinked is also upheld by Cynthia J. Miller, who stresses that one’s sense of self, narrative, and history are all directly related to the recognition of a spatial and temporal context (2008, 284). Certainly, a strong or weak sense of self has its implications on one’s relationships and choices. Hence, placing the self in a certain spatial context can substantially reveal the protagonists’ sense of self.

**Internarrative Identity**

A model that ventures to establish a relationship between one’s identity and place is significantly represented through Ajit K. Maan’s ‘Internarrative Identity.’ Such a model is applied in this article to assess the paradigms of identity transformation. Following Paul Ricoeur, Maan’s model could explain the forms of identity transformation as represented in the selected texts. The Ricoeurian approach to identity allows for a wide understanding of its ambiguity and duality, for Ricoeur conceptualizes two different senses of identity which he refers to as ‘idem’ (Latin for ‘sameness’) and ‘ipse’ (Latin for ‘self’) (Maan 2010, 73). These two concepts need to be distinguished from one another because identity is not sameness. Identity, for Ricoeur, is not merely a set of characteristics that stay the same over time (idem), it is, more importantly, the intentional self-identity (ipse) which one develops through exhibiting consistency against constantly changing circumstances (Maan 2010, xv).
Ricoeur proposes, thus, a third use of identity which results from shuttling between idem and ipse, namely ‘Narrative Identity.’ He establishes his ‘Narrative Identity’ theory on three foundations: firstly, one’s knowledge of oneself is merely an interpretation; secondly, this interpretation becomes more lucid through narrative mediation; thirdly, this mediation depends on history as well as on fiction which makes the subject's life story a “fictive history” or a “historical fiction” (73).

Maan applauds this perception of identity as it lends importance to intention as well as culture in identity formation. Nevertheless, she contradicts the traditional aspect of the theory which purports that narration of the subject’s experiences has to follow the traditional Aristotelian aesthetics of unity or else these experiences will not be meaningful in their entirety. In other words, the narrative theory does not account for alternative narratives of the self, voices, and ways of being (Maan 2010, 45). That is to say, the construction of identity does not have to parallel the development of a linear plot nor should it be complete. Maan believes that the experiences of discontinuities can be the subject matter of the story and that cross-cultural experiences may be hard to synthesize (16). Maan’s approach reflects a broader understanding of the subject’s agency as evidenced through the way s/he chooses to narrate the story rather than the temporal development of events.

Alternatively, Maan’s internarrative identity makes sense of the discontinuities in a story through spatial rather than temporal ties. Instead of understanding the “narrative” function as a technique that synthesizes experience, Maan conceives it as a means of “manipulating” and “re-associating experience” (Maan 2010, 45). Accordingly, the postcolonial narrator agency can be further enriched by redefining the self and defying traditional cultural norms instead of conforming to classical aesthetics. Maan adds that the internarrative identity can possibly engage in subversive identity performance and reversal of concepts (46). As a result, identity according to this model is established and re-established through an extended agency that is demonstrated through the texts under study.

An essential concept that impacts identity transformation is that of personal agency, especially according to the ‘performative’ view explained above. Agency, as Sunil Bhatia argues, needs to be represented or “asserted” through an act, such as “justification, denial, deflection, resistance, or acceptance” (Bhatia 2007, 3-4). However, Bhatia does not use ‘agency’ to indicate a free will. It is rather a reflection of how the bigger political and cultural forces ‘enable’ and ‘constrain’ the agent (4). Hence, agency is fundamental in identity
construction, and in the case of immigrants, it is relatively curtailed by the foreign setting and its requirements for cultural integration. A similar perception of agency is expressed by Stephen Slemon who defines it as “a question of who or what acts oppositionally, when ideology or discourse or psychic processes of some kind construct human subjects” (Slemon 1995, 50). In other words, agency is primarily asserted through resistance to the dominant culture.

Considering that personal agency is contingent upon one’s cultural and national identity, it is crucial to investigate the relationship between one’s agency, identity construction, and assimilation to the hosting culture. For Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, the concept of agency refers to:

> the ability to act or perform an action. In contemporary theory, it hinges on the question of whether individuals can freely and autonomously initiate action, or whether the things they do are in some sense determined by the ways in which their identity has been constructed. Agency is particularly important in post-colonial theory because it refers to the ability of post-colonial subjects to initiate action in engaging or resisting imperial power. (1998, 9)

Thus, agency is an integral aspect of identity as it spells the difference between a dominant entity and a subjugated one. Having the agency of name-giving is tantamount to having power over the ‘named’ person. Furthermore, agency is a defining characteristic of those who can attain identity transformation and cultural assimilation.

Based on the above explanation of agency and identity, diasporic identities can be expressed through different acts of agency. Oonk discerns three possibilities to complete the self-identifying enunciation: the “assimilative” which identifies with the dominant group, the “acculturative” which identifies with a hybrid/hyphenated identity, and the “dissociative” which dissociates one from the hosting country and identifies with the ethnic minority (Oonk 2007, 204). These possibilities represent assimilation as a choice, a view that is not fully supported by this paper. Assimilation to the hosting culture is far more complex to be simply chosen or to describe a natural tendency to identify oneself with a certain group. Rather, assimilation is realized through numerous factors among which are agency and self/other-perception.

It is crucial to note that diasporic people are not a homogenous group with similar traits; their migrations, certainly, differ in terms of their reasons, challenges, and coping mechanisms. Accordingly, their diasporic experiences
take different trajectories depending on their abilities or potentials to assimilate into the receiving culture and achieve financial and social success. The journey between dislocation and settlement in a new locale almost always has to happen through a ‘middle passage,’ which is no longer physically demanding in such an advanced globalized era. The major challenge for the migrants in crossing that ‘middle passage’ is to engage in a process of identity negotiation that helps them come to terms with the rupture of being dislocated.

**Diasporic Identity Negotiation**

Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* (1989) and Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake* (2004) are two literary representations of Indian diasporic figures and their related dynamics of cultural assimilation. Both texts illustrate transnational identity negotiation, and they seem to celebrate the transnational experience though not without concerns. Throughout the narratives, the protagonists psychologically traverse spatial and temporal spaces to bridge the gap that separates them from both the homeland and the host land. While they often yearn to return home, the host land in its own way becomes also ‘home,’ and while they have left a family behind, they may now have another family in their new setting.

Upon being dislocated, the immigrant’s sense of place is heightened in a manner that may change his/her self-perception as well as his/her relations with others. This holds true especially in the case of immigrant women whose lives are disrupted by leaving their familiar domestic spaces and endeavoring to acquaint themselves with a foreign culture to which they should adjust in order to facilitate their living conditions. As Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt believe, immigration enhances identity-consciousness, so when women are the object of the Other’s gaze, they become conscious of their “marked identity” in the host land (2000, 34). Such consciousness marks the onset of an identity conflict that some fail to resolve while others succeed for fear of becoming ‘outsiders’ to the mainstream culture in the host land or to alleviate their feelings of nostalgia to the homeland. Because of being away from the extended family, with whom they share a collective identity, the female protagonists in the two texts develop their own self-identity which turns their dislocation experience into an empowering one.

Although the two narratives adopt conflicting positions on assimilation and cultural identity, they share several commonalities. Firstly, they challenge the stereotypical depictions of Indian men and women. Secondly, both texts depict the process of placing the self within domestic and public spaces and the
implications it has on the potential of one’s cultural assimilation as well as identity transformation. With regard to cultural assimilation, Mukherjee tends to give her protagonists several opportunities for rebirth and integration. Her depiction of the title character, Jasmine, confirms that immigration for women is an invigorating experience that motivates them to create their own identity—or identities—by giving them the agency they may have been denied at home. As for Lahiri’s text, the first generation’s response to immigration is both gendered and stereotypical. In other words, men are connected with the realm of ‘doing,’ while women are left to dwell in the realm of ‘feeling:’ “The husbands are teachers, researchers, doctors, engineers. The wives, homesick and bewildered” (Lahiri 2004, 38). Regarding the difference between Ashima and Ashoke’s decision to immigrate, Ashima is following the path set forth by her traditional upbringing wherein she needs to relocate with her husband and help him pursue his dreams. On the other hand, as Ashoke challenges his parents’ vision of his future (Ranasinha 2016, 197), it is evident that “his academic job in a university outside Boston is everything he ever dreamed of” (Lahiri 2004, 49), especially after he survived the train accident which granted him an opportunity for rebirth.

In fact, assimilation in both novels is a result of placing oneself within the American culture through overcoming the conflictual multiple narratives to which the diasporic subject belongs. According to Maan’s Internarrative Identity theory, the subject can have more than one narrative and several selves that are not clearly distinct from one another (2010, 51). This entails that the subject identifies with more than one narrative and forms what Maan calls a “contingent identity” while crossing from one narrative to the next. For instance, in Mukherjee’s novel:

Jyoti of Hasnapur was not Jasmine, Duff’s day mummy and Taylor and Wylie’s au pair in Manhattan; that Jasmine isn’t this Jane Ripplemeyer having lunch with Mary Webb at the University Club today. And which of us is the undetected murderer of a half-faced monster, which of us has held a dying husband, which of us was raped and raped and raped in boats and cars and motel rooms? (Mukherjee 1989, 127)

Accordingly, Jasmine's identity fits Maan’s model of the ‘internarrative identity’ which is always in a state of flux as long as the protagonist continues to narrate her story in her own voice and keeps living as a nomad. She leaves her homeland
and embarks on a mission of honoring her husband and discovering herself, a journey that transforms her identity and self-perception. She has not settled for a long time in one place in America. She runs away from the motel in which she was raped, stays at Lillian Gordon’s house and then moves to Taylor’s house, then to Professor Vadhera’s house, and then to Bud Ripplemeyer’s house from which she runs away with Taylor in the final scene without a definite destination.

Her nomadic mobility is her means of irrevocably breaking the shackles of the past which keeps haunting her progress. By refusing to marry Bud Ripplemeyer, Jasmine/Jane is defying the fortune-teller’s prophecy of widowhood and exile prophecy which haunted her since she was still a child. She metaphorically kills the dutiful Indian woman inside her by escaping and anticipating what the future holds for her. She leaves Bud and runs away with Taylor, her previous employer who helped her become Americanized. The novel’s open ending suggests that Jasmine’s ‘internarrative identity’ is still in progress, for she still allows herself to be impacted by her diasporic condition in order to attain complete assimilation into American society.

As for Lahiri’s Gogol, his ‘internarrative identity’ has been formulated through his negative attitude towards his name, pursuit of independence from his family culture, officially changing his name until eventually coming to terms with his ethnic background and namesake after his father’s death. As has been mentioned earlier, lack of self-acceptance and social anxiety characterize Gogol’s pre-college years. However, by joining university in another city, Gogol displaces himself from his family home to develop a sense of home in the family house of his girlfriend, Maxine. During this stage, he attempts to claim a new world, carve for himself a unique personal identity in a new place where everybody may know him as Nikhil instead of Gogol. Thus, he manifests a different identity crisis being the son of first-generation Indian immigrants, Ashoke and Ashima. He takes his first act of identity negotiation when he chooses to be called Nikhil instead of Gogol. According to Judith Caesar, ‘Nikhil’ is Gogol’s ‘overcoat’ which covers his difference from other Americans (2007, 110). The new name enables him to belong to the American culture in which he was born, whereas ‘Gogol’ has alienated him from both his American culture and even the Indian one; it places him in a ‘Third Space’ that he loathed for so long. On his fourteenth birthday, Gogol received Nikolai Gogol’s “The Overcoat” as a gift from his father, Ashoke, who declared that: “We all came out of Gogol’s coat” (Lahiri 2004, 78), and knowing that his son is yet to appreciate his namesake, he only says to his agitated son that this statement “will make sense to [him] one day” (Lahiri 2004, 78). Ashoke can only hope that Gogol
may, one day, understand that he is fortunate to have a multi-cultural background which his father has painstakingly pursued. Caesar believes that for Ashoke, “Gogol is a new life, a rebirth, the creation of another life in another country, both his own life and his children’s” (2007, 110). By giving this name to his son, Ashoke has given Gogol more roots than he could understand or accept as a young boy. It was not until his father’s death that Gogol experiences feelings of guilt for alienating his father and deprecating the valuable inheritance he meant to give him, i.e. a metaphorical ‘overcoat’ of a transnational identity that can entitle him to more than his father has been able to attain in his life.

Likewise, Mukherjee’s Jasmine undergoes a process of identity-creation, a sort of metaphorical rebirth. In fact, the protagonist’s experience of widowhood, immigration, rape, among others, have made her adamant on winning her battle against fate through self-transformation. Kristin Carter-Stanborn believes that Jasmine defines herself in terms of what she had to abandon (1994, 573). Before she comes of age, the young Jyoti fails to comprehend the self-creation motif in two English novels that she encounters: “I remember Great Expectations and Jane Eyre, both of which I was forced to abandon because they were too difficult” (Mukherjee 1989, 41). In other words, Jyoti, who was placed in the cultural context of rural India, was ill-equipped to understand these Western novels so she could not identify with their themes as they contradict her conventional upbringing. On a different note, the difficulty that Jyoti faces in reading the aforementioned texts may have propelled her to enhance her English proficiency, continue her school education, and grow to become the girl who cannot marry “a man who didn’t speak English, or at least who didn’t want to speak English [because for her] [t]o want English was to want more than you had been given at birth, it was to want the world” (68). Thus, Jasmine abandons the limitations of her traditional upbringing and is able to create an evolving ‘internarrative’ identity.

Contrary to the traditional depiction of arranged marriages which mostly undermine a girl’s agency and independence, Mukherjee’s Jasmine and Lahiri’s Ashima have both gained agency thanks to their husbands. Indeed, Jyoti's marriage to the English-speaking enlightened Prakash has been a liberating, and life-altering experience, for he also wanted “more than [what he] had been given at birth” (Mukherjee 1989, 68). He taught her to reject the limitations imposed upon her by society and to live instead according to her own principles. In addition, his influence on her was so strong that his death turned her into a woman with a mission. She believes that: “It is [her] mission to bring [her] husband’s suit to America. [She is] taking it to his school and burning it where
[they] were going to live” (114). In other words, Jasmine performs what may be called a metaphorical Sati (the old Hindu ritual of a widow’s self-burning after her husband’s death as a token of faithfulness).

Rather than leading her life as a grieving widow or burning her own body, Jasmine travels to America to pursue her husband’s dream and honor his soul. Upon arriving to America, she gets exposed to the danger of being a woman of color when she gets raped by Half-Face, the illegal ship captain, whose encounter has been a turning point in her life. Instead of feeling ashamed and victimized, she decides to kill Half-Face for all the psychological and physical damage he has caused her:

I could not see myself in the steamed-up mirror—only a dark shadow in the center of the glass. I could not see, as I had wanted to, an arm reaching to the neck, the swift slice, the end of my mission. It was the murkiness of the mirror and a sudden sense of mission that stopped me. What if my mission was not yet over? I didn’t feel the passionate embrace of Lord Yama that could turn a kerosene flame into a lover’s caress. (Mukherjee 1989, 117-18)

Her murky reflection in the mirror reflects her inability to identify herself which awakened her to the fact that she has a choice and a mission. She knows that she is meant for more than dying in a shabby hotel in repentance for an act of defilement she did not cause. Thus, she looks at herself and proceeds to cut her tongue with a knife to resemble Kali. In Hindu mythology, Kali is portrayed as a naked woman with four arms, wearing a necklace of cut heads. Suchismita Banerjee views Jasmine's metamorphosis into Kali as a manifestation of her individual agency which marks the first step in her journey towards asserting herself (2012, 19). After she murders Half-Face, Jasmine feels that her body “was merely the shell, soon to be discarded” (108), which is an attempt to absolve her body from the act of murder to move forward with her life without fear. In addition, from the point of view of Hinduism, this is an act of non-attachment in which she refrains from blaming herself for resorting to violence. Indeed, killing Half-Face was possible when Jasmine reincarnated herself as Kali. This act of murder is regarded by Banerjee as Jasmine’s rite of passage into America (19) because by killing the rapist who manipulated her need for shelter, the protagonist kills the simple village girl she was before; she kills Jyoti and gives full reign to Jasmine who is prepared to embrace America and break away from the past.
Indeed, Jasmine's journey of creating her destiny has been significantly affected by her husband, Prakash. Firstly, he is the one who gave her the name Jasmine and helped her to emancipate her mind: “Prakash had taken Jyoti and created Jasmine, and Jasmine would complete the mission of Prakash. Vijh & Wife. A vision had formed” (Mukherjee 1989, 97). He represented the ambitious and adventurous spirit which is mandatory for the immigrant's successful survival in America. Inspired by Prakash, Jasmine says: “My husband was obsessed with passing exams, doing better, making something more of his life than fate intended” (85). Likewise, Jasmine becomes obsessed with getting ahead in life and defying the notion of a predetermined fate. Prakash helped Jasmine believe that “If [they] could just get away from India, … all fates would be canceled. [They]’d start with new fates, new stars” (85). Accordingly, Jyoti allows Prakash to change her and liberate her from the conventional ideas that she inherited from her family.

Similarly, in Lahiri’s The Namesake, marriage and motherhood are opportunities for identity construction. Through her arranged marriage to Ashoke, Ashima the educated Indian girl is introduced to a new reality. On Ashima’s identity transformation, Ann Marie Alfonso-Forero writes that “the uncertain young woman we encounter in the novel’s opening pages attempting unsuccessfully to recreate a favorite Indian snack in her Massachusetts kitchen is transformed through her role as an immigrant mother and wife into a transnational figure” (2007, 852). She transcends her ethnic identity and homesickness and evolves into a transnational figure, “[t]rue to the meaning of her name, she will be without borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere” (Lahiri 2004, 276). Becoming a mother has obliged Ashima to gradually engage with American culture, for she needed to have a busy routine to overcome her loneliness as her husband was getting increasingly overwhelmed by his work and research. After she gave birth to Gogol, she realized that she had to learn independence to cope with her nostalgia and overcome her feelings of loneliness. The following excerpt illustrates her transition:

She cries as she feeds him, and as she pats him to sleep, and as he cries between sleeping and feeding. She cries after the mailman’s visit because there are no letters from Calcutta …. One day she cries when she goes to the kitchen to make dinner and discovers that they’ve run out of rice. She goes upstairs and knocks on Alan and Judy’s door. “Help yourself,” Judy says, but the rice in Judy’s
canister is brown. To be polite, Ashima takes a cup but downstairs she throws it away. She calls Ashoke at his department to ask him to pick up the rice on his way home … [and] when there is no answer, she gets up, washes her face and combs her hair. …. For the first time, she pushes [Gogol] through the balmy streets of Cambridge, to Purity Supreme, to buy a bag of white long-grain rice. The errand takes longer than usual; for now she is repeatedly stopped on the street, and in the aisles of the supermarket, by perfect strangers, all Americans, suddenly taking notice of her, smiling, congratulating her for what she’s done. They look curiously appreciatively, into the pram. “How old?” they ask. “Boy or girl?” “What’s his name?” (Lahiri 2004, 34)

The above extract highlights several aspects of Ashima’s transition into independence and hybridity. The rice incident is significant not only because rice is an essential food staple that Ashima’s household depended on, but mostly because it made her realize that she can overcome her sadness and isolation outside her domestic space. It gave her the chance to seek her neighbor’s help and to go to the supermarket by herself which allowed her to engage with complete strangers who showed interest in her and her baby.

To take the argument a step further, it is crucial to analyze the protagonists’ national and cultural identities against the backdrop of Indian nationalism. In *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Partha Chatterjee explains that Indian nationalism divided culture into two spheres, namely, the material which includes the economic and modern aspects of life, and the spiritual which embodies traditions and beliefs (1993, 119). This division of culture dictated gender roles that Indians should perpetuate at home and abroad to preserve their national culture, and it allocated the material sphere to the man and the spiritual sphere to the woman. To overcome the Western hegemony over the material space, the Indians had to appropriate aspects of Western modernity and incorporate them within their own culture while protecting the sanctity of the spiritual realm where the East is considered “superior” (120). Hence, Indian women like Ashima were responsible for reviving their ethnic culture within the domestic space while men, like Ashoke, were expected to adapt to the demands of the material space and were encouraged to assimilate to the Western hosting culture.

Chatterjee elaborates on the above-mentioned domains by applying them to the dynamics of social life which she refers to as *ghar* (home) and *bahir* (the
world) (1993, 120). Being responsible for the ghar domain where the family’s spiritual essence is constructed, women seem to have a fundamentally bigger role than their male counterparts in shaping the identities of their children and the household. Alfonso-Forero rightly notes that Ashima’s identity development represents the Indian middle-class ‘new woman,’ for she strove to preserve her family’s ethnic identity or her ghar against the hegemonic US bahir in a manner that emulates older generations of new Indian women who decolonized their domestic spaces from the colonial British influence (854). Eventually, by placing herself in her domestic space as well as the public space, Ashima has developed a hybrid identity, for she continues to invoke her Indian past and revive it at home, in addition to inhabiting the American present and engaging with its culture.

Furthermore, Ashima has achieved cultural assimilation in her domestic space, Indian-American community, and American space. In her kitchen, as Anita Mannur points out, Ashima evokes a taste of home (2010, 14), where she prepares ethnic food as well as American food with Indian ingredients. At first, she and her husband used to predominantly prepare Indian food, but this changes after they become parents:

They learn to roast turkeys, albeit rubbed with garlic and cumin and cayenne, at Thanksgiving, to nail a wreath to their door in December, to wrap woolen scarves around snowmen, to color boiled eggs violet and pink at Easter and hide them around the house. For the sake of Gogol and Sonia they celebrate, with progressively increasing fanfare, the birth of Christ, an event the children look forward to far more than the worship of Durga and Saraswati. (Lahiri 2004, 64)

In fact, Ashima and Ashoke reach this level of integration thanks to the survival tactic which they gradually adopt, namely, replacing their extended families with the Indian immigrant community. Within this community, the Gangulis may assert their collective identity and create their ‘imaginary homeland.’ In their celebrations of ethnic feasts, Ashima and her fellow Indian wives endeavor to replicate India’s taste in the meals they prepare for their families. As Eve Jackson asserts: “Sharing food is a fundamental bonding ritual in which we affirm our common identity as members of a family or group” (1996, 160). Accordingly, feasting and eating with fellow Indians help both Ashima and Ashoke overcome their feelings of rootlessness. Anita Mannur shares the same view of the unifying aspect of food sharing events, for she perceives of food making and sharing as a
dominant aspect of the domestic sphere and an integral part of narratives about racial and ethnic identity as well as “an intractable measure of cultural authenticity” (Mannur 2010, 3). Hence, Ashima’s domestic space manifests her hybridized identity in terms of protecting her Indian heritage and appropriating the American culture.

After her children move out, Ashima engages more with the American public sphere. She takes a part-time job at the local public library where she befriends Americans for the first time in her life. Later, her husband leaves for a better job in Cleveland, and she stays on her own in the Pemberton Road house. She reads books in the crafts section and makes Christmas greeting cards to send to her family members as well as to her Bengali and American friends. Because of her attachment to her roles as a wife and a mother, she does not experience solitary life until she is forty-eight. This is when “she has come to experience the solitude that her husband and son and daughter already know, and which they claim not to mind” (Lahiri 2004, 161). The more she places herself within the domestic and public American space, the more adaptable to independent life she becomes.

It could be said that the more Ashoke engages with the American public sphere, the more his wife is prepared to do the same. He teaches her how she can live in America on her own by seeking opportunity wherever it presents itself and avoiding indulgence in nostalgia. When he accepts a job offer in Cleveland, he gives Ashima the choice to move with him or not; having experienced the predicaments of displacement and loneliness before, she chooses not to move with him. His absence gives her the chance to blend more with the American community, so on some occasions “she has her library friends over to the house for lunch, goes shopping with them on weekends to outlet stores in Maine” (Lahiri 2004, 163). Being less burdened by family duties, Ashima grows to think of herself more as an independent person. She begins to comprehend that her home and identity are not bound by her relationship to other people. Reflecting on her husband’s death, she says “Now I know why he went to Cleveland. … He was teaching me how to live alone” (183). A lesson that helps her survive his death and embrace her hybrid identity, for now she understands that she is no longer the same Ashima she was when she left India for the first time. Nevertheless, she still holds her Indian heritage as a sacred possession.

In contrast to Ashima, Mukherjee’s Jasmine uses her domestic American space not to achieve hybridity, but rather to completely assimilate to America. With Bud Ripplemeyer, the American banker who falls in love with her, Jasmine transforms into Jane Ripplemeyer, the Americanized exotic woman. In his household, she selectively projects her Indianness to maintain his interest and
his family's acceptance: “People are getting used to some of my concoctions, even if they make a show of fanning their mouths. They get disappointed if there’s not something Indian on the table” (Mukherjee 1989, 9). Her means of cultural integration is to please her guests through her ethnic cuisine. Thus, she seeks to manipulate the domestic sphere to be integrated within the American community through emphasizing her exotic flare.

This dominant position is illustrated through Sarah Sceats’ article “Eating the evidence: Women, power and food” where she points out that the cultural connection between women and food places the woman in a position of power as she becomes a source of nourishment, controlling those “within the sphere of her catering” (2014, 123). Sceats contends that “a whole gamut of hierarchical relations is called into question, through eating interactions, appetites and primal desires” (117). In fact, Jane’s “concoctions” are a deliberate use of power, for she manipulates the food ingredients to create a sort of addictive taste that Bud and his family are getting accustomed to. Not only does she succeed in pleasing them, she also relatively controls their appetites, for they feel frustrated when Indian food is not served at the table. Hence, Jasmine/Jane empowers herself through manipulating her migrant condition. She actualizes Salman Rushdie’s description of the migrant’s role in the target culture, as he states that “to migrate is to experience deep changes […] but the migrant is not simply transformed by his act, he also transforms the new world […] it is out of such hybridization that newness can emerge” (1992, 210). This is what Jane does when she proudly says “I’m subverting the taste buds of Elsa County. I put some of last night’s matar panir in the microwave. It goes well with pork, believe me” (Mukherjee 1989, 19). She is subverting the Americans’ taste and is also subverting her ethnic food, for she hybridizes an originally vegetarian Punjabi dish ‘matar panir’ by serving it with pork which is suggestive of her fluid identity.

Nevertheless, in the public sphere, Jasmine attempts to hide her Indianness through mimicking the dominant culture. In fact, she learns the laws of survival in America through Lillian Gordon, the American woman who gave her shelter after the rape incident. Before teaching Jasmine how to independently survive in America, Lillian gives her an American nickname, Jazzy, and advises her to have “low tolerance for reminiscence, bitterness or nostalgia. Let the past make you wary, by all means. But do not let it deform you” (Mukherjee 1989, 131). Furthermore, Lillian teaches Jazzy how to talk and walk like Americans to easily integrate with them: “if you walk and talk American, they’ll think you were born here. Most Americans can’t imagine anything else” (134-35). These are the visible elements of cultural assimilation that Jasmine needs to master to protect
herself from looking like a miserable undocumented alien to spare herself racial discrimination, let alone deportation, if she is caught. When Lillian teaches her to ride her first escalator, she warns her: “They pick up dark people like you who’re afraid to get on or off” (133). Unless Jasmine demonstrates a fluid mutable identity, she will be unable to integrate in America. In other words, she needs to be Jazzy, the Americanized woman who exudes confidence, and to suppress the insecure woman inside her.

To be genuinely liberated from the past, Jazzy endeavors to normalize her foreignness. As Inderpal Grewal argues, America gives Jasmine something that India did not, which is the choice of becoming who she dreams to be, which is more than what she was destined to become in India (2005, 69). To become American, Mukherjee's protagonist realizes that she needs to unlearn some of the Indian values that will not serve her in her new abode. In addition, she also needs to adopt American cultural norms and values as closely as possible to secure herself: “I worked hard on the walk and deportment. Within a week she said I’d lost my shy sidle” (Mukherjee 1989, 132-33). This shows how Jazzy gets liberated and empowered by mimicking the Other and breaking away from her past. Having abandoned her shyness, she “couldn’t tell if with the Hasnapuri sidle [she]’d also abandoned [her] Hasnapuri modesty” (133). At this stage, Jazzy feels suspended between the past and the present, between the homeland she left behind and the host land to which she chooses to belong.

An essential aspect of Jane's identity is that she deviates from the female stereotype in several ways. In spite of demonstrating a pattern of dependency in her relationships with most men she comes in contact with, Jane adopts a powerful position in her relationship with Bud. According to Bell Hooks, when a man is dominant, he describes himself as the subject, which relegates the woman to an object. Being the object entails that one “is defined by others, one’s identity created by others, one’s history named only in ways that defines one’s relationship to those who are subject” (1989, 42-43). However, through her refusal to marry Bud, she ensures her independence and her dominance because according to her cultural heritage, the woman becomes a follower of her husband, a role which she cannot play after Prakash’s death: “for Indian women to assert their identity, they must resist or transgress the marriage institution. Defying the patriarchal system and claiming one’s individuality can only take place in America” (Shah 2014, 87). Thus, Jane continues to live with Bud out of wedlock to deny him control over her future, defying her cultural norms which oppose such cohabitation.
To conclude, it is obvious that Jasmine's identity transformation has led her to mentally navigate the distance between two worlds, so she has reached a stage of in-betweenness. From this position, the heroine negotiates her identity to disengage herself from her home culture with its strict gender roles to assimilate to the American culture with its promises of freedom to create one’s destiny. The feeling of entrapment which she experienced in her homeland is the catalyst that prompts her to keep running away and recreating herself. It reminds her of the lessons of freedom that her deceased husband had taught her. However, Lahiri’s Gogol and Ashima experience a special kind of identity negotiation. Being a second-generation Indian immigrant continues to be an important factor in the American-born Gogol and it continues to shape his identity. It is only when he identifies with both sides of his identity that he can attain a more stable sense of self. As for Ashima, she learns to place herself in the American culture as her new adoptive home while maintaining her ties to her homeland. She gradually accepts her transnational identity, acknowledging, thus, her belonging to both countries and the impact they both have on her. Along the narrative of alienation, the protagonists’ identities unfold and transform in manners they have not anticipated. The dislocation from home becomes an empowering experience for the protagonists who attempt to actively assimilate to their adopted country without being hindered by their ethnic difference. Certainly, this empowerment is not a simple outcome of crossing borders; it is rather a product of the protagonists’ idiosyncratic experiences and dilemmas which lead to their identity transformations.

Works Cited
Indian-American Identity Negotiation


(Un)Leash the Self:
Exploring Frontiers in (Re)writing America

Reem Eldegwi*

Introduction

Upon reading Julia Alvarez’s *How the García Girls Lost their Accents* (1991; henceforth referred to as *García Girls*) and Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street* (1984; henceforth referred to as *Mango Street*) it becomes clear that both writers cross borders while representing their cultures from within a whole-white American environment. This provides a new perspective with which their attempt at formulating their identities can be seen; an outlook that stems from the fact that Alvarez and Cisneros stand the positionality of being American with a hyphenated identity, where their writings exhibit an illustration of the transnational dimension that literature assumes.

The term transnationalism has been defined and discussed by many a scholar; for example, Donald E. Pease and Yuan Shu argue in their introduction to *Re-Framing the Transnational Turn in American Studies* that “the term ‘transnational’ has replaced ‘multicultural,’ ‘postcolonial,’ and ‘postnational’ as the most frequently invoked qualifier” (2015, 2). It is a term that predetermines not just the understanding of the two texts at hand, but at the same time allows for a reconceptualization of issues such as identity, voice, and positionality, among others. Along the same lines, Bieger, Saldívar, and Voelz suggest in the introductory pages of *The Imaginary and Its Worlds: American Studies after the Transnational Turn* that “[t]he field of ‘transnational American Studies’ is growing with breathtaking rapidity, generating work on a wide range of cultural, political, and economic configurations that reach across national boundaries and change our views of what is situated within them” (2013, vii). Hence, the two texts at hand, *García Girls* and *Mango Street*, involve such ‘configurations’ in a process where many borders intersect while being crossed. Bieger, Saldívar, and Voelz contend that the transnational world “bring[s] the force of imagination, as both memory and desire, into the lives of many ordinary people, into

* Lecturer in Comparative Literature, Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University.

*Cairo Studies in English – 2020(2): https://cse.journals.ekb.eg/
mythographies different from the disciplines of myth and ritual of the classic sort” (2013, vii). And to a great extent, this is what Alvarez and Cisneros could be seen doing in their two texts examined in this paper: they depict their ‘ordinary’ characters in a manner that is not “bound by national boundaries and exceptionalism” (vii).¹ Rather the two writers can be taken to imagine a new perception of exceptionalism by means of which the power paradigms that exist between the US and its subjects could be revisited, and the moulds of identity could be dismantled.

Actually, Alvarez and Cisneros’ ‘imaginary’ embodied through the worlds of both characters, Yolanda and Esperanza, “brings forward a world that is less exclusionary and exceptionalist, more porous, overlapping, and cosmopolitan than traditional world views based on national boundaries” (Bieger et al. 2013, x). The imaginary is “a category of reflection,” one which “brings forth communities, not as illusions but as realities” (x). In this sense, Alvarez and Cisneros are bringing their ethnic groups to the foreground while writing about America. It is an America where those groups are a reality, struggling for acceptance, and theirs is a reality that crosses several borders: temporal, spatial, linguistic, geographical, and psychological. It is this ‘imaginary’ of Alvarez and Cisneros that can be considered as “an intercultural and transnational construct based on the shared desire to transcend the constraints of ethnicity or any national particularity.” (Pease and Shu 2015, 26)

Similarly, the writers’ attempts are in actuality “seeking to heal the fractures and ruptures resulting from exile and dispersal” (Stefanko 1996, 50), where their characters engage in a constant border-crossing: “As migrant souls traveling/dwelling in diverse cultural spaces, Latina writers become embedded within the process of translation” (51). Not only does this process reflect a linguistic border-crossing, but it also encompasses other borders as well; it “accompanies any other shifts across boundaries” (51). Represented as belonging to ethnic groups whose endeavor is to come to terms with the self and other while crossing the borders that come along the way, Yolanda and Esperanza’s experience in the US is harsh and severe because as members of an excluded group, they share what Lionel Trilling describes as “the same notion of life and the same aspirations as the excluding group” (qtd. in Rowe 2011, 5). In this light, this article examines how in doing so they engage in writing America, or rather re-writing it, creating a new frontier that serves as a space of accentuating who they are and, simultaneously, what the American Empire is like.
Losing Accents While Crossing Borders

In *García Girls*, Julia Alvarez tells the story of the García sisters—Carla, Sandra, Yolanda, and Sofia—and their family who must flee their home in the Dominican Republic after their father’s role in an attempt to overthrow a tyrannical dictator is discovered. In the novel narrated mostly by Yolanda, they arrive in New York City in 1960 to a life that is far removed from their existence in the Caribbean. Thus, the element of crossing borders is highlighted from the very beginning making it plausible to read the text “not as a fixed geographical, ethnically or nationally bound category of writing” (Stefanko 1996, 55), but rather “a series of boundary crossings” (55) that engage the García sisters, Alvarez herself, and by extension the reader.  

As Yolanda divulges her memories of the family’s last day on the Dominican island, she instantly highlights the nature of the journey they have to take to the American land of freedom that is supposed to provide a refuge away from the dictatorship back home:

> So here’s the part I remember about that last day. Once Nivea left the room, Chucha stood us all up in front of her. “Chuchas -” she always called us that [...], “You are going to a strange land.” Something like that, I mean, I don’t remember the exact words. But I do remember the piercing look she gave me as if she were actually going inside my head. “When I was a girl, I left my country too and never went back.” (Alvarez 2004, 220-1, emphasis mine)

Along with the accentuated strangeness of the new land, or rather the *New World*, a whole experience of crossing borders is being framed. As Jacqueline Stefanko argues that “crossing enables the reader and writer to participate in the breaking down of constructed, pure boundaries and to engage in complex heterogeneous dialogues” (1996, 51), James Clifford similarly contends that “unresolved historical dialogues between continuity and disruption, essence and positionality, homogeneity and differences (cross-cutting ‘us’ and ‘them’) characterize diasporic articulations” (1992, 108). In this light, the García journey to this *strange land* is peculiar in its singularity that is rooted in the physical and mental back and forth movement.

In this new world that is not always welcoming, their parents try to hold on to their old ways, but the girls try to find new lives, and to cross borders by forgetting their language, straightening their hair, and wearing bell bottoms. For them, it is both liberating and excruciating to be engrossed in the two worlds
they belong to. And perhaps it is in these two worlds that borders are being constantly crossed, redefined, and blurred at times. As suggested by the title of the novel, there is an inevitable sense of loss in which the García girls are entrapped; not only do they lose their accents, but they experience loss on several levels. Helen Yitah contends that “while the word ‘accents’ in the novel’s title suggests a linguistic loss, the novel seems as much about the loss of their native Spanish as it is about their loss of a firm grasp of their turning world” (2003, 234). It becomes clear from Yolanda’s narration of the novel in most of its parts that the sisters’ displacement resulting from their immigration, or rather escape, to the US has come at a great cost. Their hope for being welcomed in a country that is supposed to be their safe refuge from the atrocities of dictatorship at home gets shattered once they land in America. This culminates in a sense of loss of both their identity (who they are and where they belong) and, consequently, their self-worth, where “the profound linguistic dislocation and the resultant disorientation that the young girls experience in the United States combine to erode their self-assurance and deny them any stable sense of self” (Yitah 2003, 234). This is basically highlighted in the protagonist’s experience where “Standing here in the quiet, she believes she has never felt home in the States, never” (Alvarez 2004, 12). Yolanda, as her sisters, has already lost the sense of home when she goes to the US; therefore, no matter how hard her attempts are to cross the psychological border of loss, she ends up further alienated with a blurred self-image.

From another dimension, Yolanda’s psychological loss is further intensified through “negotiating issues of language, specifically the border-crossing of translation and bilingualism” (Stefanko 1996, 59). A significant example is her proliferation of names which advocates “the multiplicity of her identity” (59). She points out: “Yolanda, nicknamed Yo in Spanish, misunderstood Joe in English, doubled and pronounced like the toy, Yoyo – or when forced to select from a rack of personalized key chains, Joey” (Alvarez 2004, 68). This highlights her disintegrated identity and fragmented self; she finds it extremely difficult to connect with the parts constituting that self: “Through the creative medium of language, the active interpretation of translation, Yolanda is established on the hyphen where she can shift among subject positions and worlds” (Stefanko 1996, 60). As made clear, Yolanda painstakingly attempts to cross the linguistic border only to find herself levelled with ‘crazy’ people, or those who are psychologically disturbed. Her boyfriend, John, cannot really understand her when she tries to explain herself, translating her Spanish into English and, consequently, allocating to her a place of craziness: “What you need is a goddam
shrink!” (Alvarez 2004, 73). Thus, the English language Yolanda uses does not express what her Spanish could not say, rather what was said but not really understood. Accordingly, John’s reaction towards Yolanda’s attempt to cross the linguistic border can be seen in light of David W. Noble’s assertion that hyphenation is often “a form of external labeling that applies the whims and the interests of the dominant onto the subject” (2002, 44). Hence, Yolanda is left entangled within a sense of loss; a feeling of “unhomeliness,” to use Bhabha’s term, with which she struggles until it finds its way to appeasement through the space she creates for herself through writing.

Not only can Yolanda’s resolution to shift to writing be marked as an attempt by means of which “she can harmonize the multiple selves that make up her identity” (Yitah 2003, 239), but, simultaneously, hers is an endeavor to overcome and transcend the insurmountable barriers that she struggles with. In Yolanda’s situation, writing appears to be a safe space where she can experiment with her journey of self-exploration, the *santo* and the *antojo* that haunt her journey. In other words, writing enables Yolanda to conquer her displacement, subdue “the *santo* who has taken over [her],” America that is, and “quench the *antojo,*” the nostalgic craving of the homeland (Yitah 2003, 238).

Alvarez clarifies:

> Back in the Dominican Republic growing up, Yoyo had been a terrible student. No one could ever get her to sit down to a book. But in New York, she needed to settle somewhere, and since the natives were unfriendly, and the country inhospitable, she took root in the language. By high school, the nuns were reading her stories and compositions out loud in English classes. (Alvarez 2004, 141)

It is true that language is the tool Yolanda uses to “reach across worlds, to transcend the barriers or differences” created by her dislocation and the resultant experience of border-crossing (Yitah 2003, 240); however, it never comes as a facile task. Yolanda herself admits that when she was supposed to give a speech at school, “the spectre of delivering a speech brown-nosing the teachers jammed her imagination. At first, she didn’t want to and then she couldn’t seem to write that speech” (Alvarez 2004, 141). As could be suggested, no matter how difficult it is, language is a tool employed by Yolanda to claim a space that can enable her to formulate an identity shaped by the borders separating/connecting the two cultures that mold her experience. Thus, Helen Yitah contends, “it is not a question of choice between her original and adopted cultures, but some balance
of both to form a synergy from which a new identity, indebted to both but identical to neither, emerges” (Yitah 2003, 239).

From a different perspective, the English language does not present itself only as a mode of expression by means of which Yolanda can formulate her identity, but it is also depicted as a form of protection. Ironically, when her car does not start during her trip while looking for guavas back in the Dominican Republic, it is the English language that saves her; she resorts to English to save herself from her fears of the farm labourers. As suggested by Yitah, “[T]he fact that she is compelled to be and speak English at such a critical moment reveals the extent of her feelings of loss and explains her determination to recover herself” (2003, 242-3). Those feelings of loss are compensated for, or substituted by, what the adopted/host culture of the US offers; it aligns with David W. Noble’s contention that “[t]he attempted erasure of cultures and languages in the US political space has been (and is yet) carried out under the guises of the democratic justification, allowing the enterprise to appear appropriate if not organic” (2002, 34). In order to protect herself, Yolanda has to use the English language not just due to the fact that it ensures her salvation, but because it is appropriate as well.

**Crossing Borders to a House of One’s Own**

In *Mango Street*, Sandra Cisneros weaves the action of a collection of vignettes that span a year in the life of Esperanza, a young teenager, who has moved with her family to Mango Street in Chicago. Not only does Esperanza track her experience living in that house and that poor neighbourhood, but she also follows the lives of other neighbours who live around. She wishes to escape her impoverished life and to cross the borders imposed by financial and economic hurdles, to then return one day to rescue other girls there. The young girl explores the plight of the marginalised Latinos struggling to survive in a dominantly white country.

Julian Olivares argues that according to Cisneros herself the novel “hover[s] in that grey area between […] genres” (1987, 160), which sheds light on the genre-defining borders which the author crosses. Hence, Cisneros and Esperanza alike engage in a process of transcending the boundaries that shape the experience of each of them. It is from the outset of the text that Esperanza asserts “The house on Mango Street is ours … But even so, it’s not the house we’d thought we’d get” (Cisneros 1984, 3). This is an important statement on Esperanza’s part that both holds the readers’ informed understanding of the protagonist’s border-crossing and equally draws attention to Esperanza’s relationship with this house. On one level, it becomes clear that there has been a
constant movement from one house to another until Esperanza’s family manages to own one. The physical movement underscored here mirrors the borders Esperanza engages in; she struggles, first and foremost, with the psychological border brooding upon her experience in the US owing to the fact that she has never lived in a house that she can point to. The shabby house with its peeling paint stands for the harsh reality and the shattered dreams of the Hispanic family including Esperanza; life in the US has not been as promising as they have desired it to be, and so is the house. In light of Bill Ashcroft’s definition of habitation as “a way of being in a place, a way of being which itself defines and transforms place” (2001, 15), it is evident how Esperanza’s place in that house in the barrio aggravates her exclusion from the whole-white American community. It neither represents her nor alleviates the hideous consequences of her exclusion; in other words, “habitation, in its reconfiguration of conceptions of space, also engages the most profound principles of Western epistemology: its passion for boundaries, its cultural and imaginative habits of enclosure” (Ashcroft 2001, 16). Hence, Esperanza’s entrapment in a process of constant border-crossing is ineluctable while being enforced upon her by the exclusionary power paradigms of the host culture/country.

To her predicament, it is not just the house that has failed Esperanza; her name burdens her equally. After highlighting the feelings of dislocation and exclusion that are encompassed within the house she cannot point to, Esperanza admits that the meaning of her name is not the same in Spanish as it is in English; thus, intensifying her sense of dislocation while bringing under the spotlight the linguistic border within which she is ensnared. She admits: “In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting” (Cisneros 1984, 11). The different meanings of her name tell of her fractured identity and depict the impact of the two-fold barrier she has to cross; she becomes entrapped in a state of “unhomeliness” (to use Bhabha’s term), which further aggravates her exclusion. It is not surprising then that she fosters a tendency to change the name she has inherited from her grandmother, one that has blurred her identity; she states: “I would like to baptize myself under a new name, a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees” (Cisneros 1984, 11). Esperanza’s tendency to change her name can be an attempt on her part to figure out who she is and to formulate her identity, and her real self; this reveals her desire to be exonerated from a cultural burden and absolved of the cultural clash, while transcending the boundaries present between her home and host cultures. The new name Esperanza aspires for is rooted deeply in her desire to break away from the feelings of displacement fostered by the exclusionary American culture,
and that cause many of the Hispanic women “to sit their sadness on an elbow,” hence, her decision not to “inherit [the grandmother’s] place by the window” (Cisneros 1984, 11). As Olivares argues, “Cisneros inverts Bachelard’s nostalgic and privileged utopia” (1987, 160) making Esperanza’s reality a different one; it is a reality inherent in her experience as a Chicana living in the inhospitable, aggressive barrio in which she must learn how to cross the borders of her fractured identity and to transcend the boundaries of her two intersecting worlds.

Maria Elena de Valdés endorses Naomi Black’s social feminist view through which Esperanza seems to use “the doctrine of difference not to obliterate differences of kind, but to change a society that uses difference as a basis for exclusion” (1992, 55). She is determined to assert herself and formulate an identity in a society that marginalizes her, creating more borders for her to cross. Interestingly, she learns the necessary strategies from the four skinny trees with which she communicates and identifies. The analogy Cisneros weaves between Esperanza’s situation and that of the four skinny trees “who do not belong here but are here” (Cisneros 1984, 74) is significant as they mirror Esperanza’s adamant resolution to cross the boundaries that come along her way. Against all odds, she will have to transcend those boundaries like the trees that also cross the boundaries of difference and exclusion:

Their strength is secret. They send their ferocious roots beneath the ground. They grow up and they grow down and grab the earth between their hairy toes and bite the sky with violent teeth and never quit their anger. This is how they keep. (Cisneros 1984, 74)

Not only do the trees inspire Esperanza into holding strongly to her “reason for being” (Cisneros 1984, 74), but they shed light on the inevitability of crossing borders along her journey of self-exploration/realization. They provide her with strength, teach her tactics of survival, and guide her in order to “reach and [not] forget to reach” (Cisneros 1984, 75). The word “reach” signifies the process of border-crossing that Esperanza engages in, especially the linguistic one since it is through using language/writing that she manages to *keep* like the trees, realise her true self and cross borders. It is due to the fact that “The semes that we ordinarily perceive in house […] such as comfort, security, tranquility, esteem are lacking” (Olivares 1987, 167): and which she has been inspired by the trees to “keep” and “reach,” Esperanza admits: “I knew then I had to have a house. A real house. One I can point to” (Cisneros 1984, 5). She is only capable of doing so by reverting to language/writing that can guarantee her a space/house of her
own. As suggested by De Valdés, Esperanza “probes into her world, discovers herself and comes to embody the primal needs of all human beings: freedom and belonging” (1992, 60). She has to unleash her own self through writing in order to enjoy those ‘primal needs’ away from the restraints imposed by exclusion and borders. Cisneros’ protagonist subverts the exclusionary dialectics and subdues the power paradigms by using the language of the host culture/country in order to cross the borders that have silhouetted her journey. In other words, Esperanza’s ‘home’, like ‘place’, becomes freed from a simple spatial concept of location. It becomes a way of inhabiting and, ultimately, transforming global discourses of power by seeing ‘at home’ in them whatever local appropriations that may entail” (Ashcroft 2001, 197). This is true of Esperanza who manages to put the pieces of her fractured self and cross borders by finding refuge, a comfortable ‘at home’ zone that allows her a new space/place to move within and articulate who she really is.

**Conclusion**

Both Alvarez and Cisneros’ portrayal of their protagonists within such contexts emphasizes that the dimensions of transnational American Studies (in a cultural sense) are predicated on the idea that ‘America’ exists as a unified concept and should be studied as though the people who reside in spaces claimed by the US political body have some sense of being that is dependent or otherwise relational to the promulgated set of cultural myths. (Noble 2002, 6)

One of such cultural myths is the notion of ‘American exceptionalism,’ where the American culture broods upon the getaway which both Yolanda and Esperanza resort to, namely language/writing. Both retreat to English in order to be able to cross the borders that come along their journey of self-identification/realization. They venture to claim a transnational space “where one never belongs totally to one place, yet where one is able to feel an integral part of many places” (Stefanko 1996, 67). However, in doing so, they leave the reader wondering about the legitimacy of the superiority of the American culture, its hegemonic power, and discernible exceptionalism. It is valid to see Alvarez and Cisneros’s texts as distinct attempts at “imagining other positions and values” (Rowe 2011, 4) different from their own. Yolanda and Esperanza’s firsthand experience of being an American with a hyphenated identity allows
them to rewrite America. It is an exceptional America where a Chicano can acquire the unalienable American rights of ‘life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,’ only by clinging to the dialectics promulgated for by the American culture.

Yolanda and Esperanza are uncertain as to where they really belong, the home country, or the host one; accordingly, crossing borders—whether psychological, linguistic, geographical, etc.—seems inevitable given the protagonists’ desire to explore, identify, and realise themselves. As Silvio Sirias contends, “it is [their] difficulty with [their] Americanization that leads to that ambition” (2001, 25); thus, they opt for the written word and English, “a language other than [their] native one, to do so” (25). Therefore, Yolanda and Esperanza’s mandatory conformity with what the American culture dictates upon them highlights the inescapable supremacy imposed by the US culture; they had no other option, or else they would be ‘othered’ and remain excluded: “The intended outcome, then, is to limit the constitution of I and subsequently we of the residents of the space to a set of norms that reiterates the power of those who control the structures” (Noble 2001, 35); that is America.

Endnotes
1 According to Donald E. Pease, American exceptionalism means that “America is either ‘distinctive’ (meaning merely different), or ‘unique’ (meaning anomalous), or ‘exemplary’ (meaning a model for other nations to follow), or ‘exempt’ from the laws of historical progress (meaning that it is an ‘exception’ to the laws and rules governing the development of other nations)” (Pease n. pag.). A close examination of the meanings attributed to the term and a deeper look at the history of America make it evident that American Exceptionalism cannot solely be held as a valid term; it is, simultaneously, an ideology that promotes, confirms, and consolidates the image of the USA as a shining “city upon a hill”. This image holds strong grounds owing to the fact that the “American mix of Enlightenment theory and practical experience in government produced a result that was seen from the first as – there is no other word for it – exceptional” (Guelzo n. pag.).
2 Alvarez, born and raised in the Dominican Republic, had to leave the country and flee to Brooklyn, New York when she was a ten-year-old girl due to the fact that her father had supported an unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the dictator Rafael Trujillo. Accordingly, traces of Alvarez’s personal life can resonate in
Yolanda’s own experience, making the process of crossing borders relevant to both author and protagonist.

3 The term ‘New World’ unyieldingly takes back to the time when the European settlers first set foot on the American continent. As Reingard M. Nischik suggests, “Vespucci’s term ‘New World’ thus indirectly also refers us back to the fact that America, from a European perspective, was invented rather than ‘discovered’” which presents “a projection screen for many powerful dreams and myths” (2016, 11). Thus, Vespucci’s New World is juxtaposed with the one where the García girls have their dreams enveloped by the myths about America, and where the process of crossing borders is constant.

4 This kind of lack of understanding on her boyfriend’s part tells of how the American and Latino cultures are: “when not engaged in outright war, [they] have been consistently hostile to each other” (Firmat 2003, 10).

5 By applying Homi Bhabha’s concept of ‘unhomeliness’ to Yolanda, she is ‘unhomed,’ where ‘unhomely’ refers to the “uncanny literary and social effect of enforced social accommodation, or historical migrations and cultural relocation” (1992, 141).

6 As Helen Yitah argues, it is through the constant crossing of borders/boundaries that Yolanda engages in, she realizes her true “antojo,” her desire to identify herself in a way that is void of the pressures imposed on her whether at home in the Dominican Republic, or in the US, or even in her attempts to jump the puddles with which the ongoing process of crossing is affluent (2003, 239).

Works Cited


Introduction

Haiku is a short traditional Japanese poem. It is composed of three unrhymed lines with 17 *moras* (sound units) or syllables, following mainly the 5/7/5 syllable structure. It often contains a *kigo* (seasonal reference word), which is selected from a defined list that includes “spring,” “leaves”… etc. (Hakutani 1). When it first appeared in the 13th century, it was the opening part of a *renge*, an oral poem composed of a hundred stanzas. Yet, the poem broke away as a separate poem in the 17th century (Hakutani 1). It developed into a poetic genre at the hands of the “Great Four,” referring to the renowned Japanese poets Basho, Buson, Issa and Shiki. Matsuo Basho (1644-1694) began to write shorter poems known as *hokku* (now haiku) separately from the *renge*. His haiku poems are well-known for their direct, simple and natural style, the use of natural imagery in a simple descriptive mood, and the comparison and contrast of two independent phenomena. Since the form used to be viewed as part of other longer poems, it was hard to accept it as an independent medium of artistic expression, and this transformation marks the Basho’s achievement (Mackenzie 1957, 5; Hakutani 2009, 9). In fact, haiku has experienced some transitional phases through which it has sometimes been overlooked as mere imitation of Japanese poetics and, in other times, as a genre *per se*. However, it has withstood all challenges and now “there is a stronger sense of haiku as contemporary poetry, as opposed to an imitative verse form, an exotic hobby, or a spiritual way of life. A wider variety of poetic tools are now recognized as available to the 21st-century haiku poet” (Rowland 65).

During the 18th century, the Japanese poet and painter Yosa Buson (1716-1783) continued the work of Basho. His haiku poems, though, are more sensuous and richer in visual detail than Basho’s, reflecting his dual career in poetry and

* Lecturer in the Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Education, Tanta University.
*Cairo Studies in English* – 2020(2): https://cse.journals.ekb.eg/
Saeed Gazar

painting (Mackenzie 1957, 6). He also urged the use of colloquial language in haiku. In one of his haiku, one reads:

New Year’s day!
beyond my thatched cottage
barley fields. (Crowley 2007, 85)

With this approach towards simplicity and the use of day-to-day vocabulary, Buson could add a basic feature to haiku: the form is accessible to the common reader.

Both Basho and Buson had a keen interest in the Japanese landscape. They made long journeys across the Japanese mountains and villages, writing down their observations in poetry and prose (Hakutani 2009, 31). Kobayashi Issa (1763-1828) wrote about 20,000 haiku poems in which he expressed his observations on the calamities of life and portrayed his attentiveness to the small creatures in the world around him. Like Buson, Issa encouraged the liberal use of local dialects and conversational phrases. Because of the personal problems he faced -the death of his first wife and three children, an unsuccessful second marriage, the burning down of his house- his haiku added a melancholic aspect to the genre, taking it a step further towards an understanding of the nuances of human behavior (Addiss 2012, 221-236).

Haiku writing witnessed a major shift in the 19th century as modernization movements were changing most of the world, and Japan was not an exception. In 1868, the Meiji period, characterized by major political and cultural changes, brought about the demise of the feudal system and the start of a modern Japan, following the Western example. One of the loudest voices of this radical change was Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902) the Japanese poet, essayist and critic. He is regarded as the true modernizer of Japanese haiku. As early as 1892, he began to feel that a new literary spirit was needed to free poetry from conventional rules prescribing topics and vocabulary. Therefore, his dedication to haiku modernization is seen as an integral part of the Westernization movement that Japan underwent at the time (Crowley 2007, 167; Hakutani 2009, 13).

Thematically, a haiku is characterized by its directness of expression, focus on natural imagery, simplicity and intensity. The three-line poem juxtaposes two distinctive images taken from the poet’s direct experience with nature around him. Essentially, a haiku is better studied as a way of looking at the physical world and conceiving something deeper in it. Basic to this view are issues of the very nature of existence and man's relation to its various phenomena. A haiku
leaves the reader with a strong feeling or impression resulting from a moment of enlightenment when this reader uncovers some insights because of the juxtaposition of these two images. A typical example of the essence of a haiku is Basho's classic frog poem:

An old pond!
A frog jumps in—
the sound of water. (Addiss 2012, 12)

Basho portrays an image of the old pond *vis a vis* that of the jumping frog. Detached from any external interpretations, the reader finds that every word bears layers of connotations to comprehend according to his/her view of life. It is the moment when the frog jumps into the pond that triggers the reader's imagination and observation. One may infer from this haiku that nature, which is deeply rooted in history (old pond), is in complete harmony with its elements (frog). Another way of looking at the poem is the eternity of nature which is manifest in the everlasting integration of auditory, visual and kinesthetic aspects of the main elements in the poem: the pond and the frog. One such attempt of understanding Basho's haiku is Daisetsu T. Suzuki's in which he admits that:

[The] sound of water coming out of the old pond was heard by Basho as filling the entire universe.” Hearing it, “Basho was no more the old Basho. He was ‘resurrected.’ He was ‘the Sound’ or ‘the Word’ that was even before heaven and earth were separated. He now experienced the mystery of being-becoming and becoming-being. The old pond was no more, nor was the frog a frog. They appeared to him enveloped in the veil of mystery which was no veil of mystery. (qtd in Michael Hoffman, 2019)

Suzuki, a Zen Buddhist, grasps in this haiku the complete harmony of man and nature and the relation that transforms what is apparent to the reader- a frog jumping in the pond- into a transcendental experience of the sublime. In brief, a haiku necessitates the reader to reconsider, reread and ponder over the possible interpretations and insight one may discover in just 17 syllables. This justifies the claim that a haiku presents “[T]he entire universe in 17 syllables!” (Hoffman 2019).

These unique features assist the view that haiku can be dealt with as a transcultural genre. Once Yone Noguchi (1875-1947), the Japanese poet, introduced the form to the rest of the world, many attempts spread over Europe
in French and English. Notable among such poets are R. H. Blyth, Kenneth Yasuda and Harold Henderson, though some claims suppose that it is Ezra Pound who wrote the first haiku in English: “In a Station of the Metro” published in 1913. Recently, there have been interesting attempts at writing haiku in Arabic. Ezz El-Din Almanasserah, a Palestinian poet, made his first attempts at the genre in the 1960s. Other avant-garde poets, namely Inas Asfari, Ghadeer Hanna and Basem Al-Qassem, to name just a few, have made notable contributions in this respect.

This poses the question as to what makes haiku able to cross cultural barriers. This study, qualitative in nature, explores the features of haiku that help it become a transcultural genre, manifesting the shift in cultural studies from the individualistic specific ‘cultura animi’ view to the more pluralistic and inclusive one that marks present-day globalized worldview. The study of the haiku written by Masaoka Shiki and the French-Canadian poet Jack Kerouac reveals the existence of such common essential characteristics of haiku. Though they belong to different generations, their haikus are aesthetically linked together, and thus have a strong basis to claim this genre as an epitome of transculturalism.

The Shift from Multiculturalism and Interculturalism to Transculturalism

Cultural studies have witnessed a shift from the close examination of culture as a reflection of the nation-state domination over its geographical boundaries and ability to keep its unique cultural characteristics. Wolfgang Welsch stresses that this Herderian concept of culture glorifies social homogenization, ethnic consolidation and cultural delimitation. This segregating view does not suit the modern age where the notions of isolation, alienation and homogeneity have led to what Welsch calls the “folk-bound” conception of culture, societies and even individuals. “The classical model of culture,” Welsch maintains, “is not only descriptively unserviceable, but also normatively dangerous and untenable” in that it portrays cultures as closed spheres (2001, 59-63). The efforts to find an alternative way of dealing with the variety of cultural groups within modern societies have led to multiculturalism and interculturalism. These efforts seek the demolition of any barriers among human societies.

Given the diverse cultural backgrounds in any given society, multiculturalism, in essence, stems from the recognition of all social groups, with their diverse backgrounds. According to this view, social groups of various cultural backgrounds can live peacefully together in any given society. However, this mode has its own drawbacks. It can be the reason for a competition between
such groups existing side by side within the same geographical boundaries. Each group tries to exercise its power over the other *minor* groups, reinforcing the dominance of the more powerful culture. Welsch suggests that going multicultural does not overcome the constraints of the traditional concept of culture. It, moreover, provides the proper environment for “ghettoization and cultural fundamentalism” (2001, 65). The cultural, racial or political barriers remain there, hindering the real understanding of this diversity, or even the transgression of such barriers. The same defect can be traced in the case of “interculturalism” which claims cross-cultural dialogue and denies self-segregation tendencies within cultures. It glorifies diversity, and describes the wide range of communication processes and problems that naturally appear within any social context made up of individuals from different religious, social, ethnic and educational backgrounds. The term denotes an attempt towards peaceful coexistence, understanding and cooperation among cultures. The Council of Europe gives the example of Intercultural Cities Programme to prove the benefits of going intercultural. One benefit is the movement from just the recognition of “other” cultures to “regarding diversity as an asset, and helping them (i.e. Intercultural Cities) to develop policies for advantageous diversity management” (*Council of Europe*). Yet, interculturalism, in this sense does not affirm the removal of barriers among cultures. It, rather, establishes them firmly in citizens' minds, even within the local milieu of a city. It recognizes the “island or sphere-like constitution of cultures” which “necessarily leads to intercultural conflicts, and attempts to counter these with intercultural dialogue” (Welsch 2001, 66).

The concept of “transculturalism,” which can be defined as “seeing oneself in the other,” seems to overcome the aforementioned limitations. It is based on the breaking down of boundaries, and glorifies liberation. “It is rooted,” Richard Slimbach contends, “in the quest to define shared interests and common values across cultural and national borders” (2005, 206). Slimbach equips the transcultural learner with a “cognitive map” that would guide him/her through this transcultural odyssey. Transcultural competence can be cultivated through various techniques whose result can assist individuals to “bring their knowledge of relationships within their own culture to the process of cultivating relationships across cultures…. Our aim is more modest: to cultivate a new way of seeing the world, and thus, of understanding ourselves” (2005, 207). This is achievable because, instead of constructing barriers, “we discover the ways that others make sense of their world. In so doing we expand the range of alternative
mores and manners, values and visions that are available to us for running our lives” (2005, 209).

Another positive aspect of the transcultural approach is the fluidity it provides. Globalization has made the transition of people as well as cultural products among world nations much easier, reinforcing the idea that change is the essence of human interaction. Jeff Lewis stresses that the temporal nature of everything is inherent even in cultural affairs. Since culture is formed in language, it is thus marked as “transitory, unstable and dynamic.” This makes of culture “a resource for identity liberation, diversity, free imagining, and expressiveness” (2002, 16). Transgression of barriers in this case is attainable and gains solid ground over other terms of multiculturalism and interculturalism, which do not negate the existence of barriers among cultural groups.

The third benefit of transculturalism is the notion that truth can never be located in one culture or society. There is an urgent need to be open to, and subsequently accept, alterity. Slimbach believes:

The very particularity of our cultural experience is what limits our knowing, and renders the truth contained in our perspectives and positions partial at best. This is why we must enter into the thinking of those shaped by other cultural and political traditions. Only by doing so can we move toward broader knowledge and fuller truth. (2005, 212)

Transculturalism, as such, marks a change in the view of diversity among people. Cooperation and the desire to complement each other would be the main incentive for a transcultural position. It also allows for cultural experimentation, leading ultimately to cultural development and the birth of what Arianna Dagnino calls “the liquid age” in which citizens become “de-territorialized” (2013, 130). This is affirmed by a similar increase in the use of the term “global citizens,” stressing the high rate of mobility in the world today.

**Haiku as a Transcultural Genre**

In the preface to *The Haiku Masters: Four Poetic Diaries*, Gail Sher says:

[S]ince the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the poetic form known as haiku has moved from the wards and precincts of Japan’s old cities to circle our planet. What was once a specifically Japanese
verse practice...is now the most widely practiced form of poetry in North America, Europe, and possibly worldwide. (2008, ix)

Sher's words give a way to questioning how haiku has attained this global transcultural position. In essence, the genre is based on several aesthetics rarely found in other poetic forms. Its main goal, as Kerouac stresses, is to “see the natural world sharply, refresh our language, and to redirect our focus: 'aiming towards enlightenment’“ (qtd in Sher 2008, ix). To achieve enlightenment, a haiku poet focuses on a moment devoid of any background: cultural, political or social. To read a haiku means to be free of any historical bearings, traditional bias and direct associations to specific poetics other than the notion that the human experience of the world is a whole unity. A haiku stresses this freedom from all associations in order to reach the Edenic form of living in and with the universe. It offers, Tom Lynch believes, “the possibility of absolute novelty, of freedom from the past and tradition, of a human potential for absolute beginnings at any time” (2001, 116-17). This possibility stems from haiku's dependence on the concise phrasing of an experience, which strikes the reader's attention and calls for deep contemplation. Haiku also requires the reader to depend only on sensual and direct experience of the elements represented in the poem per se, without making any allusions to theories of philosophy or intellectual inferences. Given that, one can discover a new relationship with the world, or at least view difference in this world differently.

This departure from the need to interpret a haiku in light of a certain background helps the reader to move a step further towards believing in universal unity, which is central to haiku writing. Japanese poets had this approach in mind throughout their career, backed by the Zen traditions which denote that “an Edenic escape from preconceptual frameworks” (Lynch 2001, 117) is always there for man to discover and enjoy. In his Introduction to Zen Buddhism, Suzuki maintains that “(I)f there is anything Zen strongly emphasizes, it is the attainment of freedom; that is, freedom from all unnatural encumbrances” (1964, 41). Man can now think of all animate and inanimate objects as complementary, forming a unity of existence. This very direct experience of the world is where Zen and haiku converge. What Zen, after all, is about is that man's mind must be free (Suzuki 1964, 41). For Suzuki, one has to see the world with naked eyes and touch it with real hands: a condition that is prized by “heavens” that are brought down to earth:
Zen reveals itself in the most uninteresting and uneventful life of a plain man of the street, recognizing the fact of living in the midst of life as it is lived. Zen systematically trains the mind to see this; it opens a man's eye to the greatest mystery as it is daily and hourly performed; it enlarges the heart to embrace eternity of time and infinity of space in its every palpitation; it makes us live in the world as if walking in the garden of Eden; and all these spiritual feats are accomplished without resorting to any doctrines but by simply asserting in the most direct way the truth that lies in our inner being. (1964, 45)

Zen, which is central to the haiku experience, directs humans to the path of rediscovering the universe around them. The starting point here is ignorance in the sense that man starts reading haiku with nothing but the state of “not knowing:” a state asserted by Lynch as the sine qua non of haiku composition (2001, 119).

Central to the genre is letting objects express themselves through the objects themselves rather than the poet's personal experience of such objects. The sense of harmony with nature is reflected in every haiku. “A classic haiku,” maintains Hakutani, “while it shuns human-centered emotions, thrives on such a nature-centered feeling…. This sensibility cannot be explained by logic or reason. Longer poems are often filled with intellectualized or moralized reasoning, but haiku avoids such language” (2009, 10). Being based on direct experience of the world, haiku leaves room for the reader to rethink, reconsider and ponder the possible meanings latent in the three lines, and the poet only lets the objects presented in the poem speak their poetic nature through words.

Another aspect of haiku that adds to its ability to be a transcultural genre is its economy and briefness. Short as it is, a haiku stipulates a moment of enlightenment in the reader's mind. Despite the enigma the reader might feel towards the poem at first, the concise phrasing and order of images urge the reader to stop and contemplate the hidden truth behind these few words. This conciseness and condensation of expression is advantageous in that the reader does not indulge in long narratives that require, in a way or another, allusion to external bearings. Mike Spikes finds a strong correlation between haiku and Ockham's razor principle which appreciates economy in everything. For Ockham, “it is vain to do with more what can be done with fewer” (qtd in Spikes 2013, 64). In haiku, the economy of expression emphasizes the reader's freedom
to interpret the poem the way he/she pleases, adding more weight to the transcultural effect of the genre.

Yet, this economy of expression is not haphazard. The poet is keen on portraying the two images in a way similar to the cinematic montage where every scene is designed to trigger a specific effect if looked at from certain angles. This effect, naturally, changes with the change of the angle. In haiku, the same technique is there. Owing to the concise phrasing of the three lines, the reader can look at them from any angle and reach any conclusion. With no background whatsoever, any reader can uncover some hidden truth about life and human existence.

Dealing with the genre in Arabic, Bushra Bustani finds that haiku writing depends mainly on “cinematic montage where there are both a structural cut and a connotation link. This cut-link feature of haiku allows the poet to start with the normal then shock the reader with a totally different level of connotation” (Translation mine) (2015, 49). In this way, the reader has to immerse him/herself in this very decisive moment, trying to decipher whatever meanings this scene can bear. In this tough mission, the reader will not resort to any traditional inventory of knowledge; what is required is just intuition and interaction with the elements of such a scene. This reading of haiku includes a transition from the personal to the universal and transcultural:

The haiku aesthetics shift from the private self, sect and approach, to the general worldly cosmic issues of the human community. It is a shift from the limited to the comprehensive: saving man from self-isolation through opening the door to all that is communal and universal in front of him. (Bustani, 2015, 51; translation mine)

This resonates with Haruo Shirane's remark that Basho intended his poems to be “a literary text that had to transcend time and place,” and is “understood by those who were not at the place of composition…so that the poem would have an impact beyond its original circumstances” (2000, 63).

**Masaoka Shiki and Jack Kerouac: Transcultural Poets**

Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902) was a poet, author, and literary critic in the second half of 19th century Japan (the Meiji period). He is most notable for his remarkable efforts in revolutionizing, as well as modernizing, haiku, making of it an authoritative poetic genre. Shiki, for Charles Trumbull, was the right person in the right place at the right time. He was born of a samurai family that faced many financial problems. His early years were affected by the death of his father
when he was only five years old, and his mother insisted on providing him with private tuition. Moving to Tokyo, he attended the Imperial University in 1890. However, he had to drop out because of his interest in haiku and due to his ill health as he caught tuberculosis. For the rest of his life, his suffering continued until his death in 1867 of the same disease. He was keen on expressing his suffering and the contemplations related to the long days and nights he spent on bed in his writings (Addiss 2012, 267-275).

At that time, poetic short forms such as haiku were declining in popularity and regarded as unsuitable for the new Meiji era. Shiki, on the contrary, could defy such an attitude and silence these hostile voices. Influenced by the mainstream spirit of revolution, renovation and reform that characterized that period, Shiki's attempts to do the same to shorter Japanese poems in general, and haiku in particular, were far from being futile. He wrote a long piece on haiku reform called * Talks on Haiku from the Otter’s Den* which was serialized in the *Nippon*, a Tokyo newspaper. He stressed the importance of using everyday language in haiku. This progressive step towards realism made his poetry instantly impressive. Burton Watson, who introduced Shiki's haiku to the English readership, comments on the role played by Shiki in the development of the genre as:

> Shiki succeeded in injecting new life into the form and restoring it as a vehicle for serious artistic expression. Since his time, the writing of haiku has constituted an integral part of the Japanese literary scene, and in recent years the form has been taken up by poets in many other countries and languages as well. (2003, 10)

Using informal, spoken language, he stressed the need to resort to the traditional roots of Japanese poetry as a standard for defining modern Japanese modes of expression.

Shiki's efforts to revolutionize the genre are, in many ways, synonymous with Jack Kerouac's achievement as a haiku poet. Kerouac is the one who coined the term “Beat Generation” and, as Barbara Louise Ungar mentions, “one of the first dissatisfied writers who discovered the new wealth of the East” (2007, 21). Jack Kerouac was born in 1922 in Lowell, Massachusetts, to French-Canadian parents. He was a serious child who was devoted to his mother, because she was a devout Catholic and instilled in him this deep faith. He joined Colombia University, but soon dropped out and formed, along with Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs, what became The Beat Generation (Theado 2000, 9-12).
His personal life, full of disappointments, led him to write *The Town and the City*, a novel about the torments he was suffering as he tried to balance his wild city life with his old-world family values. Shocked by the disparity between materialistic city life in 1950's America and his Buddhist readings, he, following in the footsteps of Japanese haiku poets, made some amazing cross-country trips while working on one of his novels. Worthy of note is his experimentation with freer forms of writing, partly inspired by the unpretentious, spontaneous prose. He decided to write about such trips exactly as they had happened, without pausing to edit, fictionalize or even think (Theado 2000, 31). This marked the birth of Kerouac's style of writing. In April 1951, Kerouac threaded a huge roll of paper into his typewriter and wrote the single 175,000-word paragraph that became *On the Road*. Published six years later in 1957, the novel made Kerouac instantly famous, giving him the title of a spokesperson for the “Beat Generation,” those young people in the 1950s and 1960s who scorned middle-class values. His classic book became the bible of this countercultural generation.

Despite Shiki's and Kerouac's different cultural backgrounds, they share their intense belief in transcultural aesthetics, outlined above. They sought freedom and found in haiku a medium that transcends all cultural boundaries. In the following section, the study will examine how the two poets' visions are reflected in their haiku through the examination of three basic approaches: accepting alterity, *shasei* and free association.

**Accepting Alterity**

The first trajectory through which Shiki's and Kerouac's haiku could cross cultural borders in Japan and the US is their readiness to accept *alterity*. Alterity is commonly defined as “the Other,” denoting difference and diversity. The term has come to be part of many disciplines such as philosophy, theology, ethics, phenomenology, feminist theory, queer theory, hermeneutics, psychoanalysis, psychology and cultural anthropology. However, Emmanuel Levinas' (1906–1995) definition has a strong affinity to the study of haiku as a transcultural genre. For Levinas:

> Alterity is not found in the other bearing additional traits or qualities beyond us, nor as being different by greater or lesser degrees along continua, as these would be constituents of an alter ego and not an other. Alterity as otherness, rather, is always the quality of the other that escapes the self’s comprehension, resists possession by the self, refuses to be subsumed into preexisting categories of knowledge or
consciousness, and is not merely the complementary opposite of a total system with the self. (qtd in Huett and Goodman 2014, 82)

Alterity, according to Levinas, has much to do with negating the self's preeminence as superior to other identities. This allows for a perception of “Other” cultures as having qualities that are valuable in themselves, and thus necessitates demolishing the cultural boundaries that may separate the Self and the Alter. Accepting alterity may be viewed as corollary to political as well as social change. This coincided with the transformations, both political and cultural, which the two poets witnessed. During such periods, the society is directed to ways of reform, wherever they are, particularly if this reform provides an escape from the status quo.

Just as Shiki came in close contact with the Western culture during the Meiji period, which marked the Japanese Westernization process, Kerouac articulated the need for an open mindedness to the wealth of Japanese culture. The latter found in Buddhism and Zen a resort to self-satisfaction, thus the birth of the Beat Generation. Hakutani maintains that during the 1940s, Kerouac “immersed with American transcendentalism, read Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman … [and] was influenced by Emerson's concept of self-reliance … stubborn independence and refusal to subscribe to society's materialistic, commercial demands” (2009, 91).

Shiki realized the urgency of the Westernization of Japanese poetic forms, including haiku. He lived in a period when complete awareness and openness to the West was necessary. The abolition of feudalism made possible tremendous social and political changes. Millions of people were suddenly free to choose their occupation and move about without restrictions. By providing a new environment of political and financial security, the government made possible investment in new industries and technologies. The most important feature of the Meiji period was Japan's struggle for the recognition of its considerable achievements and for equality with Western nations. Japan was highly successful in organizing an industrial, capitalist state on Western models. In the light of all these transformations, Shiki could present to the world a type of haiku that could survive to this day (Sumikawa).

Similarly, the US had undergone a change in thought during the 1950s, when Kerouac's interest in developing American haiku was at its highest. The period leading up to the 1950s was considered the Era of Conformity. At that time, the majority of Americans were living in suburban areas called Levittowns after Abraham Levitt (Crystal Galyean). Threatened by Communism, they were driven by conspicuous consumption. Men would go to work all dressed up in a
gray or blue flannel suit while women were domesticated as they stayed home to cook, clean, and tend the children. For Americans at that time eating a family dinner and watching TV every night was considered a conservative tradition. However, this all soon changed post WWII. People were tired of the routine and felt “beaten” down by the traditional lifestyle. ("What is the Beat Generation?") Change was inevitable, and the Beat Generation could effectively achieve it. Experimentation with new literary forms, including haiku, and a total openness to Eastern spiritualism such as Buddhism and Zen were the fruit. Kenneth Rexroth juxtaposes Japanese and American cultures:

Japan became a dream world in the metaphorical sense – a world of exquisite sensibility, elaborate courtesy, self-sacrificing love, and utterly anti-materialist religion, but a dream world in the literal sense, too, a nightside life where the inadequacies and frustrations of the American way of life were overcome, and the repressions were liberated and the distortions were healed. (1973, 151)

Many of Shiki's haiku give witness to this openness to, and acceptance of, the West as well as the modernization processes under which Japan went. Elements such as “the rail” and “the ship” mark this clearly.

Low over the rail-road,
Wild geese flying;
A moon-lit night. (Blyth 1952, v. 4, 62)

This haiku moment is one of harmony between the wild geese, flying over the modern railroad in a night lit by a natural source (i.e. the moon). Despite the fact that this haiku depicts the supremacy of the natural over the man-made, it highlights the connectedness, if not the mutual harmony, between both. Shiki is not keen on presenting the modern as opposed to the traditional; on the contrary, he keeps an eye on the collaboration of both since they mark 19th century Japan. This is echoed in the following haiku where he observes that:

A lonely
Railway station;
Lotus-flowers blooming. (Blyth 1952, v. 4, 62)
The representation of the Western railway station and the traditional Japanese lotus-flowers side by side is unique. Shiki stresses the two basic characteristics of this haiku: loneliness and blooming. The blooming of the lotus can be apprehended as an emphasis on the revival of the ancient in times of modernization. The Japanese always boast of this ideal as they never give way to the modern in place of the traditional. The sea, a remarkable element of Japanese geography, marks the same notion:

A great ship
Towing a small boat behind it
Into the haze. (Blyth 1952, v.2, 87)

The ship, which is seen by many as great, towers over the small boat in a view that puts both as complementary elements. To know that both go into the haze may lead the reader to realize how they will soon be invisible or covered by other natural elements in a harmonious liaison. Haiku as a genre has always been linked to the natural world, and Shiki's innovation is in his encompassing both the traditional and the modern inside the haiku natural framework.

Kerouac's openness to the East parallels Shiki's keen interest in the West, influenced by the Confucian thought that the universe consists of heaven, earth, and humans in complete harmony. This sparked the notion of peacefulness in nature in Kerouac's mind, and, one may venture he became dissatisfied with the Western lifestyle that is focused on materialism. In his haiku, he intensifies the need for a worldview that stems from the Eastern (Japanese) culture.

Reflected upsidedown,
In the sunset lake, pines
Pointing to infinity. (Kerouac 2003, 101)

In a moment of deep contemplation, Kerouac grasps this upsidedown nature of life in the modern age. Materialism could not satisfy the soul's needs and infinity could be reached through the return to nature. Pine trees and their reflections in the lake water form a line to infinity: a goal that 20th century people in the West earnestly seek.

Kerouac also celebrates universal integration through maintaining that nature is stable, while the materialistic view of the world changes constantly. He tries to draw the backyard and after a while he observes that it is still the same:
The backyard I tried to draw
- It still looks
The same. (Kerouac 2003, 117)

This realization of the eternal fixed characteristic of natural elements assists Kerouac's belief in Confucian thought that largely depends on the harmony and stableness of the entire world. Hakutani once again remarks that, like Basho's, Kerouac's haiku glorifies universal integration: “despite the human creation of the space, they (garden/backyard) still belong to the earth, a permanent space under heaven” (2009, 95). The same attitude can be found in the following haiku:

The summer chair
Rocking by itself
In the blizzard. (Kerouac 2003, 36)

Even inanimate objects (the chair) react to natural phenomena in an indication that they are part of a global, universal system of which humans are no exception. The “chair” is qualified by “summer” to signify the relatedness to nature. It even has inherent power to move by itself like any other element in this system. Life in all its forms, Kerouac contends, is organic, albeit superficially changeable.

Yet, Kerouac is also aware that both the modern (Western) and the traditional (Eastern) must together. Nothing is contradictory between them.

No telegram today
- Only more
Leaves fall. (Kerouac 2003, 5)

This haiku depicts someone waiting for a telegram, which may be a usual habit. At the same time, this person still observes the falling of more tree leaves on earth. The juxtaposition of the telegram and the leaves provides enough room to incorporate both in one frame. Here lies the greatness of haiku as a genre that is capable of lasting and crossing any borders.

**Shasei: Fact over Fiction**

The other main strategy through which haiku could transgress American borders is the ideology of *shasei*. It originally means “sketch from life,” and has much to do with realism and the insistence to depict things as they are in real life. This could grant haiku a characteristic peculiar to this genre since it negates imagination and gives the reader a solid ground to stand on throughout ages and
geographical milieus. *Shasei* is itself trans-cultural: it is related to Western schools of painting. Trumbull's search for the origin of the term led him to Watson's commentary on Shiki's resort to it. Watson sees that the poet borrowed the term from the vocabulary of Western painting because “the writer was to carry out minute observation of the scenes around him and to compose works based on what he saw there, conjuring up the mood or emotional tenor he desired through apt manipulation of the images found in real life” (Trumbull n.d., n. pag.). The reason for Shiki's admiration of *shasei* is what he read in Herbert Spencer's *On Style* in which he argues that a good writing style has to depend on clarity and lucidity. This aspect has greatly influenced Japanese writers in general, and Shiki in particular. John Ruskin's idea that the representation of facts must be the foundation of all art was the other source from which Shiki derived the basic concept of *shasei* (Trumbull n.d., n. pag.).

Lee Gurga maintains that Shiki's contribution to the development of *shasei* can be traced through three hierarchical stages: sketch from life, selective realism and poetic truth. The poet moves forward through these stages in order to attain truth, which is the core of haiku:

Shiki did, in fact, support the use of imagination in haiku, but proposed that poets attempt to use it only after they had developed a sufficiently fine perception of the world and experience of truth. Only then could they be trusted to attempt to convey their personal vision to the reader through the distillation of imagination. Shiki's suggested development of the poet – from “sketches of life” for the beginner to “selective realism” for the more advanced poet to *makoto* or “poetic truth” for the master is as valid today as it was one hundred years ago when he proposed it. (2000, 60)

According to Peter Lamarque (2014, 121-23), poetic truth denotes several meanings, prominent among which are seriousness, sincerity and absence of fault. The poet tries hard to attain poetic truth through sincerity to nature as it is. Everything depends on both the poet's and the reader's direct experience of the two images in a haiku. Reaching the moment of enlightenment, which is a tough mission, requires the reader to be serious and sincere to the objects *per se*, rather than what these objects may connote. Haiku masters, such as Basho, were keen on highlighting this goal: attaining *makoto*, or truth in poetic art. Gurga assures that the reason behind haiku transgression of cultural borders is its dependence on realism, or *shasei*. This stems from the poet's essential fidelity to Nature rather
than empty imagination. That is why when English speaking poets, Kerouac is an example, came in contact with Japanese writing, they at once adhered to its aesthetics and propagated them in their work. Trumbull has good reasons to claim that most American haiku are merely shasei haiku.

Shiki seeks makoto in his haiku. He urges the reader to stop and value the silence before, within and after the words where one thinks deeply until reaching a moment of enlightenment. Here lies haiku's major benefit. In the following haiku, for example, he is not only sketching the image of blossoming pears, but he also directs the reader’s attention to the destroyed house after a battle.

the pear blossoming  
after the battle this  
ruined house. (Blyth 1952, v.1, 66)

Ideas of rebirth and the resourcefulness of nature are present in this haiku. The aesthetic of “fact over fiction” permeates haiku and makes of it a transcultural genre. The reader is left free to infer other ideas and get deeper into the haiku. For instance, in cultures that have suffered from the effect of wars, this haiku will instill the horrible effect of battles in the minds. Others may find in it a hope that every battle has an end. On a third vein, spiritually speaking, the ruined house may refer to the catastrophic impact of materialism in general, and capitalism in particular. There is an urgent need for a spiritual renewal of the human psyche. The same applies to a haiku like the following:

looking down I see,  
cool in the moonlight,  
4000 houses. (Beichman 1982, 51)

Here, the reader realizes that the speaker is on a higher place than the houses. A feeling of ecstasy may ensue when the moonlight covers the 4000 houses beneath. Shiki presents his readers with a realistic image with loads of deeper meanings.

Referring back to Trumbull's comment that American haiku is shasei haiku, it is evident in Kerouac's work that capturing realistic snapshots of nature is one reason for its greatness as well as its uniqueness. Addressing a bee, he says:

Bee, why are you  
staring at me?  
I'm not a flower! (Kerouac 2003, 15)
Kerouac affirms the beneficiary relationship among all living things. Here, from the bee's perspective, a flower is the source of nectar, and man is supposed to be its enemy rather than the source of nourishment. Yet, the question mark may urge the reader to pause, think and review the relation with natural elements. Through *shasei*, the representation of life as it is and the search for truthfulness rather than truthiness (i.e. superficial incorrect view of life) assists the reader on the journey to attain *satori* (comfort and peace of mind) (Hakutani 2009, 81). Kerouac celebrates this state in many haiku:

```
Quietly pouring coffee
In the afternoon,
How pleasant! (Kerouac 2003, 47)
```

The tranquility one enjoys in the heart of nature, away from the madding crowd in city life is the apprehension one finds in this haiku. Hakutani reports that Kerouac lived in close contact with nature throughout his career (99). Attaining *satori*, the poet, and the reader in return, will have the chance to get wiser and realize the integration of everything in this world:

```
In my medicine cabinet
The winter fly
Has died of old age. (Kerouac 2003, 12)
```

Medicine, which does not help the fly to live longer, will not help humans either: another fact over fiction case.

**Free Association**

Inherent in haiku writing is its reliance for the most part on free association. The genre eschews logical or theoretical backgrounds for its understanding. Richard Iadonisi highlights this resistance to “New Critical craft” which depends on “rational means of composition” (2014, 292). All haiku take free association as a point of departure; the poet takes a snapshot of whatever he/she observes, frames it under whatever background and leaves the rest to the reader. No meaning is definite for any haiku, but the deep thinking of the wordiness, so to speak, will guide the reader in a process of free association. Thinking of haiku as a transcultural genre, this element is basic in this respect. Haiku could transgress American as well as European borders through this space of freedom.
that the reader enjoys in inferring whatever meanings and arranging them in any order. An example of this is Kerouac's icebox haiku:

    Missing a kick
    At the icebox door
    It closes anyway. ((Kerouac 2003, 16)

Human limitation, universal power and system are mere examples of the sheer association of ideas that may come to the mind from the first reading of this haiku. Other layers of associated ideas can be thought of according to the reader's perception and background. For instance, Iadonisi finds in it a proof of Kerouac's negligence of the feminine, making of haiku a masculine form of art (2014, 295). Shiki also urges the use of conversational everyday language in order to allow this stream of associations. His poems are marked by a kind of flexibility that allows him to draw upon scenes in his memory. In the following haiku, the contradiction between presence and absence triggers a battle in the reader's mind with no victorious part:

    Always someone resting there --
    a lone rock
    in the summer field. (Watson 1997, 65)

The eternal presence of “someone” is contrasted with the “lone rock.” In a sense, this evokes a stream of associations related to this unknown person who “always” rests there. At the same time, ideas related to the reason for resting there, and the identity of this place will open up the door to an endless process of stream of consciousness. The seasonal term “summer” plays its role in evoking notions of heat, aridity and loneliness. Yet, the “lone rock” has been in company with others all the time. Now, it suffers the agony of being forsaken by people. This may also relate to ideas of the man-nature dichotomy in the mind.

**Conclusion**

This study provides a close examination of the various strategies and trajectories through which haiku, the Japanese poetic form, could cross American borders. Shiki’s contribution to the modernization of the genre, emphasizing the importance of fact over fiction (shasei), assists in the liberation process a haiku reader undergoes. Adhering to the Zen traditions of sincerity to nature and the use of everyday language frees the reader of any cultural background, and permits the free association of ideas of any type. The
achievement of Shiki's efforts can be clearly seen in the introduction of the genre to Americans in the middle of the twentieth century. The work of Kerouac, one of the Beat Generation founders, is a true representation of the same trajectories taken by Shiki. Both poets depend on the genre's brevity, condensation and strict form in their writing. The genre could also be transcultural through accepting alterity, shasei and free association. As such, the study opens the door for more studies of haiku in other languages, especially Arabic, which, despite its complexities, has adopted the genre.

**Works Cited**


Lamarque, Peter. 2014. The Opacity of Narrative. London: Rowman &
Littlefield International.
Lewis, Jeff. 2002. “From Culturalism to Transculturalism.” Iowa Journal of
Cultural Studies, no. 1 (Spring):14-32.
Zen Aesthetics to Explore the Dialectics of Flourishing.” International
Journal of Wellbeing, vol. 6, no. 2: 14-29.
https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v6i2.497
in East-West Literary Criticism: New Readings edited by Yoshinobu
London: John Murray.
Overview and Assessment.” The IAFOR Journal of Literature and
Crane Press.
Haiku Myths.” Modern Haiku vol. 21, no. 1: 48-63.
Spikes, Mike. 2013. “Haiku and Ockham's Razor: The Example of Jack
Japan.” Lehigh University. www.lehigh.edu› courses › spring › Papers › pdf ›
shs3
Atlantic.
Theado, Matt. 2000. Understanding Kerouac. South Carolina: University of
South Carolina Press.
Trumbull, Charles. N.D. “Masaoka Shiki and the Origins of Shasei.”
<https://www.thehaikufoundation.org/juxta/juxta-2-1/masaoka-shiki-and-
the-origins-of-shasei/>.
Performance Poetry as a Performative Act: A Close Listening to Andrea Gibson’s Poetry

*Sahar Elmoougy*

Performance Poetry and Cultural production

In the year 1917, Amy Lowell deplored the entrapment of poetry on the printed page. “Poetry is as much an art to be heard as is music, if only we could get people to understand the fact. To read it off the printed pages without pronouncing it is to get only a portion of its beauty, and yet it is just this that most people do” (Lowell 1917, 46). Lowell was drawing attention to the acoustic quality of poetry as an essential layer of signification. It is no exaggeration to say that in the past century, performance poetry has come to exceed Lowell’s ambition. Performance poetry has chartered a new path for poetry, parallel to the printed page, albeit embedding the aesthetics of performance. The poem’s meaning broke free from the confines of the printed page to include the poet-performer’s physical presence, his/her interaction with a live audience as well as the paralinguistic and paratextual elements of the performance mode. The genre of performance poetry has come to be regarded as “one of the most significant developments in English-language poetry” (Novak 2011, 30).

Julia Novak (2011) places performance poetry as a subgenre under the broader umbrella of live poetry (33) which includes the traditional poetry readings (62). She states that:

live poetry can be defined as emerging from the fundamental bimediality of the genre of poetry – i.e. its potential realisation as spoken or written word – as a specific manifestation of poetry’s oral mode of realisation, which is a parallel to, rather than a mere derivative ‘version’ of, the written mode. As such, live poetry is characterised by the direct encounter and physical co-presence of the poet with a live audience. The poet will predominantly perform his/her own poetry and is thus cast in the double role of ‘poet-performer.’ The story and images of the poem are conveyed through

* Lecturer in the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University.
*Cairo Studies in English – 2020(2): https://cse.journals.ekb.eg/
the spoken word rather than through theatrical ostension, as focus is placed on the oral verbalisation of the poetic text. (62)

In defining performance poetry, it is important to differentiate it from spoken word although some critics and poets use the two terms interchangeably. Both subgenres belong to the same oral mode of realization. But while spoken word is “a broader concept which may include prose, poetry, or even storytelling or stand-up comedy”, performance poetry is strictly poetry put in the performance mode (33).

The genealogy of performance poetry throws light on one of its most significant characteristics, namely, its position against the mainstream. In its inception during the Harlem Renaissance, its growth over the twentieth century and its booming in the last four decades, performance poetry has always engaged in social, political and poetic opposition to the mainstream. In his theorizing for performance poetry, Jonah Raskin (2011) discusses the impact of Allen Ginsberg’s performance of “Howl” in 6 Gallery in San Francisco which sent political and poetical shock waves across the US. Raskin (2011) states that “after a year of writing and rewriting, “Howl” evolved into a poem about coming out: sexually, politically, and poetically. It became a poem about the act of writing and the act of performing poetry (30). Eventually, “the cultural wave that the Beats and the Beatniks had started morphed into the counterculture” of the 1960s (30). Since then, performance poetry has maintained its counterculture position. In the UK and the US, it could be encountered in a wide variety of settings from poetry slams and open mic events to anti-war gatherings, literature festivals and “formal settings” such as universities, to name but a few (Novak 2011, 62).

This counterculture position is discussed in the introduction to Performing Poetry: Body, Place and Rhythm in Poetry Performance. Cornelia Grabner and Arturo Casas (2011) highlight “the positioning of performed poetry on the intersection between the social, the political, and the poetic” (17):

The poetry performance explores the implications of this hybridity and develops the creative possibilities that it opens up, especially for those who find themselves in marginal positions or who experience their identity as multiple. Moreover, the contingency of form and content allows for the conclusion that the performance of poetry as a practice and “performance poetry” as a genre highlight the significance of the cultural for the social and the political, and that it
provides artists with a powerful mode of critiquing and challenging mainstream cultures. (18)

Along the same lines, De La Rosa (2013) discusses the ability of spoken word and slam poetry to be “a powerful form of cultural production”:

Similar to its artistic and political roots found in the Harlem Renaissance, the Black arts movement, jazz, the beatniks, Hip Hop, and so forth, spoken word and slam poetry are also the outcomes of diverse genealogies that have come to highlight social, political, and spiritual realities, experiences, and cultures of marginalized bodies and identities. As such, spoken word poetry is an example of how performance is a powerful form of cultural production that allows for the creation and expression of alternative and multiple knowledges. (1)

The “alternative and multiple knowledges” offered by the genres of slam poetry, spoken word and performance poetry is evident in the variety of voices expressive of marginalized identities such as the African Americans, LGBTQ and poets with left-wing political views. The poetry and live performances of performance poets give voice to the multiple groups who are not at home in mainstream culture. In The Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry (2009), Somers-Willet states that “Poets’ proclamations of marginalized identities on the slam stage are articulations of diversity performed in resistance to the (somewhat exaggerated) homogeneity of official verse culture” (69). Performance poetry, just like its subgenre sisters slam poetry and spoken word, registers various articulations of marginalized identities.

**Performance Studies and Performativity**

The field of performance studies and theories of performativity offer insights into the various ways performance poetry operates on the level of cultural production. Performance studies highlights how the term “performance” has escaped the confines of the classical definition of an act imitating life, or what is real. Performance poetry represents an example of this perception of “performance” because when a poet performs his/her poem, the audience does not perceive this “performance” as an act. The poem speaks of the identity of the poet, his/her self is laid bare for the audience to witness and share in the creation of this identity. Performance studies deal with this collapse of boundaries
between what is an act and what is real. In *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (2013), Richard Schechner highlights this collapse of boundaries between what is an act and what is real. He states how “[p]erformances have come to be seen as “any action that is framed, enacted, presented, highlighted, or displayed” (2). Schechner elaborates:

Performance must be construed as a “broad spectrum” or “continuum” of human actions ranging from ritual, play, sports, popular entertainments, the performing arts (theatre, dance, music), and everyday life performances to the enactment of social, professional, gender, race, and class roles, and on to healing (from shamanism to surgery), the media, and the internet. (2)

In such light, more people are experiencing their daily lives as a chain of performances, often overlapping:

- dressing up for a party, interviewing for a job, experimenting with sexual orientations and gender roles, playing a life role such as mother or son, or a professional role such as doctor or teacher. The sense that “performance is everywhere” is heightened by an increasingly mediatized environment where people communicate by fax, phone, and the internet, where an unlimited quantity of information and entertainment comes through the air. (Schechner 2013, 49)

Performativity is even a broader term pointing to an array of possibilities offered by a world where clear demarcations between what is an “act” and what is “real”, media and live events, and performing onstage or in everyday life are collapsing, and “[i]ncreasingly, social, political, economic, personal, and artistic realities take on the qualities of performance” (123). In the field of performance studies, the term “performativity” “points to a variety of topics, among them the construction of social reality including gender and race, the restored behavior quality of performances, and the complex relationship of performance practice to performance theory” (123).

First conceived by linguistic philosopher J. L. Austin in *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), the term “performative” was coined to describe utterances which are also actions such as promises, bets, curses and contracts. These
utterances do not describe actions; they are actions (Austin 1962, 8-10). Austin (1962) states:

The term [...] “performative” is derived, of course, from “perform” [...] it indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action. [...] The uttering of the words is, indeed, usually a, or even the, leading incident in the performance of the act. (6-8)

But while Austin made a differentiation between the performative utterances which are actions and the same utterances turned hollow when said by an actor onstage or in a poem, performativity developed in an opposite direction since Austin. It has become an approach that perceives social reality as a construct (Schechner 2013, 123). It was Postmodernism which stretched the “performance principle” so that it would apply to all aspects of social as well as artistic life (129). Hence, nowadays, “[p]erformance is no longer confined to the stage, to the arts, and to ritual” (129).

It is important to realize that Postmodernism, as “a practice in the visual arts, architecture, and performance art” and Poststructuralism as “an academic response to postmodernism” constitute practices and theories of performativity (123), and that these practices and theories are in essence anti-authoritarian and subversive:

The first wave of scholars and artists – those who devised poststructuralism and practiced postmodernism – were vehemently anti-authoritarian. They elaborated Austin’s ideas of performativity in ways that were philosophically, politically, and aesthetically anti-authoritarian. Today’s poststructuralists and postmodernists continue this work of subverting the established order of things. (Schechner 2013, 141)

Judith Butler is one of the poststructuralist theorists who developed Austin’s performatives. Sharing with the poststructuralists the broad objective of “decentering”, their “attack on every kind of hegemony, authority, and fixed system – philosophical, sexual, political, artistic, economic, artistic” (Schechner 2013, 147), Butler theorized for gender as a performative act. Her basic premise is that “[g]ender reality is performative, which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed” (Butler 1988, 527). She also points out that if the ground of gender identity “is the stylized repetition of acts through
time, and not a seemingly seamless identity”, then the possibilities of gender transformation lie in a different sort of repeating, a breaking or subverting of this style (520). Uncovering the hegemonic processes which create inscribed gender performatives, comparing gender roles to rehearsed theatrical performances, Butler is sharing in the poststructuralist endeavor to undermine “inscribed” power as Derrida names it. For him, “writing” is more than graphic inscription and literature; writing is extended to include cultural expressions and social practices which create entire systems on “inscribed” power: laws, rituals, traditions, hierarchies, politics, economic relations, science, the military, and the arts (Schechner 2013, 143). Derrida (1998) highlights the inextricability of writing and power (50). The fact that writing enacts agendas of power, i.e. those who write are actually performing authority, should not make us overlook the fact that writing and power never work separately. Derrida (1998) states:

Fostering the belief that writing fosters power […] that it can ally itself to power, can prolong it by complementing it, or can serve it, the question suggests that writing can come [arriver] to power or power to writing. It excludes in advance the identification of writing as power or the recognition of power from the onset of writing. It auxiliarizes and hence aims to conceal the fact that writing and power never work separately, however complex the laws, the system, or the links of their collusion may be. (50)

The Derridean identification of writing as power, “the fact that writing and power never work separately”, illuminates the politics of performance poetry and how it is constantly engaging with and challenging inscribed power. It is as if the poets are using the holes and open cracks in the collective narrative to re-write counter-hegemonic narratives representing marginalized voices and communities. But these counter-narratives do more than represent the marginalized. The act of writing/performing becomes an act of creating identities and communities.

**For the Sake of Close Listening**

A decade ago, scholars and critics were faced with a general lack of critical tools suited to the study of poetry in the performance mode. Novak (2011) points out how literary criticism continued to “sideline or outright ignore live poetry as a subject for academic study” while providing an array of analytical tools “geared towards extracting the potential, ‘imagined’ sound that is ‘built into the
written poem’ but no critical tools with which to attend to the spoken word….” (55). She states that:

[t]aking aspects such as body language or audience interaction into account would therefore require a paradigmatic shift in poetry criticism from a system of thought that privileges the written mode as it purports to provide methods for an analysis of poetry’s sensual acoustic aspects, to an approach that fully acknowledges live performance as an alternative realisation mode and thus directs the critic’s attention to a range of novel criteria that have hitherto been dismissed as lying outside the domain of literary criticism. (55)

In *Live Poetry*, Novak realizes this “paradigmatic shift in poetry criticism”. Rather than dealing mainly with the verbal content of poetry and the potential sound of poems, she provides the scholar of live poetry with a toolkit capable of dealing with the poem as an acoustic and a theater event.

The live poetry toolkit allows for a close listening to the performed poem where an examination of the paralinguistic and paratextual features is integral to the meaning and effect of performed poetry. On the one hand, the live poetry toolkit looks into the paralanguage which is “the non-verbal voice qualities, modifiers and independent sounds and silences with which we support or contradict the simultaneous or alternating linguistic and kinetic structures” (Poyatos quoted in Novak 2011, 76). The toolkit examines layers of signification offered by aspects of vocal behavior such as the voice qualities, speed, loudness, pitch, the use of hesitation and intonation (Novak 2011, 76). On the other hand, it looks into the effect of the paratextual features such as the poet’s physique, dress code and body communication.

**Gender is not a Fact**

Over the last two decades, Andrea Gibson had four published collections of poetry and seven CDs. Believing in and acting upon the motto of *Vox Feminista* (a multi-media performance group of radical feminists), “comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable” (Gibson 2015), Gibson tours extensively and performs their poems in as many venues as they can. The mediatic and cultural hybridity of the genre of performance poetry is realized in Gibson’s performances which engage with elements of theater, performance art and music. And when onstage, it is clear that Gibson is not putting on an act. The poet presents their true identity. Gibson’s body and dress code speak of their
defiance of the gender binary of male/female just like their choice of the pronoun “they”.

Gibson is fully aware of walking a path where activism and writing/performing go hand in hand (Gibson January 11, 2018). They state that:

several years ago I started noticing that my priorities as a writer were changing. I recognized that I wanted to make art that helped; art that had the potential to change something for the better. That was my number one hope going into every show, and while it’s the nature of spoken word to write on themes of social justice, I hadn’t always been that clear in my reasons for doing what I do. (Gibson January 11, 2018)

Much of what Gibson writes is about gender and gender queerness. They give voice to those who defy gender binaries. But the curious thing is that they do not write what they know. Gibson writes in order to know (Gibson April 8, 2019). Hence, writing does not perform the task of self-explanation as much as it becomes a process of self-exploration (Gibson January 29, 2018). In multiple interviews, they use many verbs to reflect on one act, that of knowing. Gibson states for instance that they write to “unpack”, “learn about”, “discover”, and “uncover” their gender (Gibson May 1, 2018). Unearthing is another verb Gibson uses when they state that “often I am a different person after finishing a poem, because of the parts of myself I unearth in the process” (Gibson January 29, 2018).

The idea of creating one’s gender, reiterated quite often by Gibson, resonates strongly with Judith Butler’s theoretical formulation of gender as a performative, a cultural construct entrenched in the social. For Butler (1988), gender reality is a performance, i.e. it is real only to the extent that it is performed (527). She states that gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo (520). Butler (1988) elaborates:

The act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again. (526)
Performance Poetry as a Performative Act

At the heart of the performativity of gender is the body. When Butler states that one “does" one's gender, she is simultaneously saying that “one does one’s body” (521). The body is the stage where the performative plays itself out. Butler recalls Simone De Bouvoire’s statement on the body, and how it “is a manner of doing, dramatizing, and reproducing a historical situation” (italics in original, Butler 1988, 521). She takes Bouvoire’s statement as a springboard towards an affirmation that “the body is not just matter but a continual and incessant materializing of possibilities” (italics in original, 521).

In performance poetry, the meaning of a poem stretches to encompass, in addition to the verbal language, the poet’s body language. Gibson’s poems, many of which deal with gender queerness, acquire signification from the themes as well as from the way Gibson’s body challenges rather than reproduces the dominant gender binary. This segment of the essay focuses on “Boomerang Valentine” because the poem does not deal with gender issues. In the absence of gender politics, the weight of the analysis will not fall on the theme but rather on the way Gibson’s body and dress code represent an act of gender queerness.

Performing “Boomerang Valentine” (Gibson December 28, 2018), Gibson is wearing a hat which covers their short hair but not the relatively longer hair on the forehead. They are wearing a plain unisex grey vest. The grey T Shirt under the vest shows the contours of their arms which are well-toned but not exactly masculine. The tattoos on both arms, between the wrists and elbows appear like bracelets, but they are not exactly feminine. In brief, Gibson’s body is hard to classify according to the classical gender binary. They state: “I don’t necessarily identify within a gender binary. I’ve never in my life really felt like a woman and I’ve certainly never felt like a man. I look at gender on a spectrum and I feel somewhere on that spectrum that’s not landing on either side of that” (Gibson 2015). In “Boomerang Valentine”, Gibson’s gender queer physique becomes a paratext to the performed poem.

In “Boomerang Valentine”, Gibson seems to be expanding on the first two lines of “Your Life”, another poem which deals with the queer position outside the gender binary. In the opening lines of “Your Life”, the poet states: “It isn't that you don't like boys/ It's just that you only like boys you want to be” (Gibson 2017). “Boomerang Valentine” goes on to explore the question of self-love albeit painted in gender queer language. In the opening lines, the audience knows about the poet being “intentionally single and celibate for the first time since I was 20 years old” (Gibson December 28, 2018). Back then, they believed “sex had to involve a dude and the word “screw” (Gibson December 28, 2018). The two words I put in bold letters are the first in the poem to receive stress and a
stretching of the two long vowels in “dude” and “screw”. The stresses seem to underline a fallacy entertained earlier in the poet’s life. Gibson is telling their friend about the psychic who said they will meet the love of their life by the end of January. But it is January 10th and they are “far from ready for Cupid, that naked little shit, to fire anything sharp my way” (Gibson December 28, 2018). When the friend poses the question: “What if you are the love of your life?” (Gibson December 28, 2018), Gibson stretches their arms forward with open palms as if welcoming the invitation. The gesture is accentuated by another stress on “you” and an elongated “u” sound. This is followed by an exclamatory tone where Gibson shakes off the idea “because I am absolutely not my type” (Gibson December 28, 2018). Negation is also represented in a hands’ gesture. However, Gibson decides to consider for a moment what if they are actually their type: “Let’s say I am my dream girlish boyish girl” (Gibson December 28, 2018). The description of that potential self-as-lover depicts a gender identity that breaks away from the male/female binary replacing it with the non-binary of “girlish boyish girl”. The description is accompanied by a hand gesture that juggles the adjectives from one hand to the other and then back.

Music, soft and subtle, comes in with the line starting with “Let’s say”, and stays in the background as Gibson explores the possibility of this romance. In comparison to the opening lines of the poem, the tempo slows down as the scene is drawn of Gibson standing at their front step, ringing the bell, waiting for themselves to answer “so I can hand myself a mason jar full of water lilies I have rescued from a millionaire’s Monet” (Gibson December 28, 2018). The poem moves from the depiction of the first meeting where Gibson is charmed by the self-as-lover to an assumption that they are not just chewing on an “old cliche” which says we have got to love ourselves:

we don’t
I know I can keep getting down on myself ‘til I’m tucked into the grave
Looking up at my name, carved in stone, wondering why I never knew I’d been cast the lead in my own life. (Gibson December 28, 2018)

As shown in the above lines, the idea of self-love leads to an exploration of the reasons behind its absence; namely, self-beating, and undervaluing the self.

In the next segment, Gibson ushers the audience into the dilemma by using the pronoun “you” and a finger pointing towards the attendees. The hypothesis
is expanded not just when it comes to each one being cast the lead in their lives, but also to how we are violent towards ourselves, framing what we perceive as flaws, forgetful of things like “tenderness” and “compassion” (Gibson December 28, 2018). However, a turning point takes place as Gibson continues:

No
that is not how anything grows
Of all the violence I have known in my life, I have not known violence like the way I have spoken to myself. (Gibson December 28, 2018)

The “no” is delivered in staccato. Disconnected from what comes before it, the negation stands on its own, a stressed beat located in the middle between two short pauses. Another stress falls on “grows”. The assonance of the “o” vowel creates an exclamatory tone related to the reminder that nothing could grow from that place of violence. A faster tempo takes the audience through a depiction of self-loathing, as if the legato utterance (where words are smoothly connected) is an enactment of the self-beating:

And I have seen almost everyone around me hold that same belt to their own backs
An ambush of every way we have decided we are not enough
Then, looking for someone outside of themselves to come clean that treason up. (Gibson December 28, 2018)

Posing the question: “If I were to ask myself out of that cycle” (Gibson December 28, 2018), Gibson is playing on the double meaning of “ask out”. The verb breaks from the confines of the dating game and comes to refer to breaking out of dominant cultural cliches which fuel self-loathing. In order to break free from that cycle, Gibson states the kind of self-talk necessary for the process. They repeat “I am still” in four consecutive sentences. They are still going through their “growth spurt”; they are still “yet to get my worst tattoo”; they are still “clearing the smoke from burning the toast I wrote for my own wedding day”; and they are still “trying to get rid of my mirror face/ Look myself dead in the eye” (Gibson December 28, 2018). The repetition of “I am still” is delivered in a fast and rhythmic tempo that seems to come from a gush of life experienced by the poet. This strong tempo materializes the future state of becoming and its endless possibilities. Admitting they have not survived certain things, knowing
other people had to work to survive them, Gibson moves towards a final affirmation that:

I want the heavy to anchor me brave
  to anchor me loving
  to anchor me in something that will absolutely hold me to my word
When I tell Cupid I intend to keep walking out to the tip of his arrow
To bend it back towards myself
To aim for my goodness; 'til the muscle in my chest tears from the stretch of becoming
When I came here to be a lover of whatever got covered up by the airbrush
The truth of me: that beauty of a beast. (Gibson December 28, 2018)

Judith Butler (1988) argues against gender being a fact since “the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all” (521). The way out of the scripted performativity of gender lies in its very character as a performative. That is to say, when “individual actors choose not to actualize and reproduce the gender performative there is a possibility of contesting gender’s “reified status” (520). Discussing the complex links and the difficulty of drawing the line between theatrical and social roles, Butler pinpoints how “gender performances in non-theatrical contexts are governed by […] punitive and regulatory social conventions” (527). Her argument refers to forms of theater which contend with and even break down the conventions that demarcate the imaginary from the real. In such cases, “the act is not contrasted with the real, but constitutes a reality that is in some sense new, a modality of gender that cannot readily be assimilated into the pre-existing categories that regulate gender reality” (527). In performance poetry, poet-performers are not perceived as performing an imaginary act. They represent their identities. Gibson is one of the “individual actors” who chooses not to walk the trodden path of the gender performative.

Performance of Authorship
In 1988, Peter Middleton presented the concept of “performance of authorship” which applies to authors reading their works whether or not they are conscious of their performance. In his essay “The Contemporary Poetry Reading” (1988), Middleton focuses on authors demonstrating their authority by reading aloud. He discusses the significance of the physical presence of the
speaker “to a specific body, point of view, and history. Such effects are obviously greatly amplified when the speaker is the author, when the moment of reading acts as a figure of an imaginary moment of composition” (268). According to Middleton, both the words spoken and the speaker earn credibility and authority through live performance. In her Ph.D. dissertation “The Role of the Poet: Poetry Performance at the Beginning of the Twenty First Century” (2010), Mary Elizabeth Jones-Dilworth adds another layer of meaning to the performance of authorship. She defines “authority” as “not only as the author-ness of the poet, but the ability to influence” (9).

While Middleton and Jones-Dilworth discuss the performance of authorship as a means of realizing authority, Somers-Willet stretches the concept to make it apply to the way authors gain authenticity. In The Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry: Race, Identity and the Performance of Popular Verse in America (2009), Somers-Willet explores how the slams act as “cultural stages where poets perform identities and their audiences confirm or deny them as ‘authentic’ via scoring” (8). Authenticity is achieved when the audience feels a performance to be honest, sincere and reflective of lived experience. In performance poetry, there is no scoring like in the politics of slam poetry. Yet the poet is still granted or denied authenticity through the reception of the audience. Gibson’s performance poetry realizes the multiple dimensions of authorship. Middleton’s definition of “the performance of authorship” applies to Gibson’s work, mainly characterized by the quality of liveness. Despite being a published author, Gibson views live performances as a major constituent of her poetic identity. Gibson states:

I think that especially with spoken word […] it has an energy behind it that’s very emotional. And I think it requires a lot of emotional presence by the person speaking the poem […] it’s a conversation between the poet and the audience and the audience in a lot of ways sort of pulls the emotion and pulls the poem out of the poem and I think that when we’re creating art from an emotional place it’s really effective because I don’t think people typically respond and change things in their lives from facts. If you’re on stage and you start talking about the statistics of the number of deaths in Iraq, the numbers just reaches people’s heads. You’re gonna be more effective if you get up and honestly and emotionally tell the story of one Iraqi mother. (Gibson December 27, 2018)
The connection Somers-Willet (2009) establishes between performance of authorship and authenticity also applies to Gibson’s work. It is evident to their audience that the poetry speaks of the identity of the poet. The words are in sync with the poet’s authentic self. But gender is not the only constituent of Gibson’s performance of authorship. In many of their poems, they speak openly about their depression and panic attacks. Gibson performs those poems with the awareness that the space of performance poetry is a space for uncovering who they really are (Gibson April 15, 2019). This act of uncovering influences the audience. It comforts the disturbed (Gibson 2015). It assures them they are not alone. Others suffer states of intense emotions, but they speak about them. And the act of speaking out transforms these feelings. They metamorphose into empowerment.

Gibson’s “Ode to the Public Panic Attack” (Gibson January 15, 2018) is one example of this act of uncovering which is simultaneously a performance of authorship. The poem, as evident from the title, is about the poet’s panic attacks. In both their interviews and poetry, Gibson speaks openly about suffering panic attacks and depression. They also criticize the cultural conditioning when it comes to expressing emotions. They state:

just being expressive with your feelings and the ways that we’re culturally expected to closet our emotions. The idea that there’s just a closet around love or sexuality is sort of hilarious. I think we’re also that way with grief and panic and anxiety and depression, and I think we also closet our bliss. We’re culturally expected to taper it all down. (Gibson 2015)

Gibson admits to having full-blown panic attacks onstage. Whenever this happens, they perform “Ode to the Public Panic Attack” in an act of radical honesty and vulnerability (Gibson August 2, 2018). The poem depicts the overwhelming emotional nature of panic attacks, and in its last segment, Gibson subverts the perception of panic attacks as weakness. The poet begins by directly including the audience members as both the addressees of the poem and witnesses to her confession of suffering panic attacks. The first four sentences begin with “You find me” (Gibson January 15, 2018). Gibson is found “at the movies/ at the coffee shop, at the grocery store buying comfort food”, they are found “on dates”, at “Disney world/ in line for the Little Mermaid/Slow moving Clam ride” and at “parties so often I stopped celebrating my own birthday” (Gibson January 15, 2018). The tempo in the opening lines of the poem is slow
in comparison to what will follow. With each of the four sentences/scenes the tempo accelerates, and the legato utterances create a sense of fluidity as if the scenes coexist. The tempo gets even faster till it becomes breathless as the audience sees Gibson on the airplane:

You found me on the airplane,  
then in the arms of the medic,  
after the plane stopped on the runway  
and turned around to let me off.  
Don’t worry, the medic said,  
It’s just a panic attack. (Gibson January 15, 2018)

Being on an airplane is immediately followed by “then in the arms of the medic” with no breath before “then” as if being on the plane is one and the same thing as being in the arms of the medic. This sentence is uttered in one breath and in a very fast tempo which reenacts the breathlessness of the panic attack. It is as if being on an airplane entails the collapse of chronological time characteristic of states of panic, hence the overlapping of the panic attack, the plane stopping to let them off and the “don’t worry” of the medic.

The first time a word receives stress, becomes a beat, is found in the next sentence where Gibson stresses the “that” in the answer to the medics’ sentence. They take a short breath before: “as if that would comfort me” (Gibson January 15, 2018). Explaining what is meant by “that”, the following two lines also embed stressed beats. In the following lines, the words in bold are uttered in staccato; the are disconnected from the rest of the utterance:

as if that would comfort me,  
to be told I am the enemy,  
my body its own stalker. (Gibson January 15, 2018)

The tempo slows and the stresses fall on the “I”, “am” and “enemy”. The staccato highlights the struggle of the self-suffering the panic attack, its being both the victim and the enemy. Gibson translates this idea in the following image:

That’s just my heart  
giving my sternum a high five  
fifty times a second. (Gibson January 15, 2018).
A “high five” is a casual greeting gesture that does not entail intense emotions. However, Gibson accompanies the stresses on the number of heartbeats a second with a slapping motion of her right hand, a slap with each beat of the three: “fifty”, “times” and a “second”. The strong and fast slaps create a paratext for the emotional turbulence accompanying the attack, a layer of signification that is not present in the verbal content. Another instance of significant body movement takes place with the following lines:

Just relax and calm down  
always seems like helpful things to scream
if oxygen has never been over your head,
if your body has never become its own corset. (Gibson January 15, 2018)

With the last image, Gibson hugs her torso tightly with both arms. Her voice as a result chokes with the tightness of the body becoming “its own corset” and the less oxygen coming into their lungs. Their voice is stifled, its volume down.

In a middle segment of the poem, Gibson states how they would have liked to make their audience “uncomfortable” with their politics but not with their “body flailing like the about-to-be-dead-girl in a teenage horror flick” (Gibson January 15, 2018). Gibson makes her (comfortable) audience uncomfortable through her politics of gender. But could they also be creating this state of discomfort through the performance of their own vulnerability, the laying bare of states of panic attacks while the poet-performer is on stage giving their poem? There is a certain paradox here, a liminal space hosting both vulnerability and the performative of speaking it out. But the performative in this case is subversive. It does not perpetuate the act of closeting emotions. The final lines of the poem point in this direction.

Unlike the fluid and legato-like nature of the previous lines, indicative of the overwhelming nature of panic attacks, the final segment witnesses a slower tempo and a louder volume which takes a crescendo curve. Gibson’s voice is louder with more staccato utterances evident in the stresses falling on the “I”, the “am” and the “done” in “I am done with the shame/ the cage of self hate”. The slower tempo of this utterance, its loudness and staccato-like nature not just accompany the turn of meaning, they perform the act of subversion. Through an affirmative tone of voice and a tall strong body, Gibson delivers an utterance which transforms the shame and self-hate into a celebration of their courage. There is courage in “knowing there is a promised jaw” outside their door and
still stepping “towards the horror” (Gibson January 15, 2018). There is also courage in the act of laying bare one's vulnerability in front of the gazing eyes of the audience/witnesses. On this affirmative tone, Gibson wraps up the poem:

**I am done** with the **shame**, the **cage** of **self hate**
the **lie** that this is weakness when I am certain it is
the mightiest proof of my strength.
how hard it is **to live** knowing there is a promised jaw
outside my front door
and still **I step towards the horror**
**still I say here I am world**
let’s make relaxation look like a crime we’ll never get busted for.
Let’s hyperventilate
Like it is 1999. (Gibson January 15, 2018)

Grabner and Arturo Casas (2011) point out how the performance of poetry obliges poets to address the question of authorship (11). One of the possibilities opened up by this question is that “the performance can frame individual authorship within a context of community or collectivity” (11). In this light, Gibson’s poems on depression and panic attacks could be seen as an attempt to use authorship to create a community for those who suffer not just similar states of emotional vulnerability but also the social expectations of closeting their emotions. “Ode to the Public Panic Attack” ends with an invitation which involves the audience, hence completing the circle of audience involvement. While the early lines of the poem address the audience as witnesses to the confession of suffering panic attacks, the last lines extend an invitation to the audience as a collectivity capable of taking action. The poet urges the audience: “let’s make relaxation look like a crime…” (Gibson January 15, 2018). Gibson states that her therapist’s definition of depression is to push down, or depress feelings; then they point out how writing, which is an act of expression, is the very opposite of depression (Gibson April 8, 2019). “Ode to the Public Panic Attack” is but one of many examples where Gibson heals the emotions that have been depressed through the act of writing and the public act of performing. This double act of writing/performing is a subversive performative.

**Etching defiant narratives**

Acting upon the belief that no writing is first or final, that no narrative is closed, performance poetry offers rich possibilities for re-writing cultures. It is
an open arena for performative acts which challenge and decenter social constructions such as that of gender. In discussing two of Gibson’s poems where gender is not the thematic focus, this essay was allowing space for a close listening to the messages delivered through the paralinguistic and the paratextual features. Whether gender is the focus or not, Gibson’s live presence onstage and their body language communicate an alternative knowledge. In the space of performance poetry, Gibson is not only creating their identity, but they are also performing authorship in a way that offers validation for the emotionally vulnerable and for other gender queers. Gibson provides their audience with what they missed while growing up shrouded in shame and fear (Gibson January 22, 2018), namely courage and acceptance of one’s identity. This space for validation is an indication of cultural change. Butler’s assumption that in the very character of gender as a performative lies the possibility of deconstructing it, is fully realized in the performance poetry of Gibson who belongs to a much bigger mosaic of performance poets etching defiant narratives. Gibson is well aware that the act of speaking the truth is a political act, so is the act of creating art and putting beauty in the world (Gibson December 10, 2018). They never fail to act upon this belief.

Works Cited
Performance Poetry as a Performative Act


Sahar Elmougy


EMERGING VOICES

Crossing Borders in Uniform: The Construction of Subjectivity in a Post 9/11 Blogosphere

Fatima-al-zahraa Ahmad Ramy*

Introduction
In his second inaugural address on January 20, 2005 after being re-elected as a president of the United States for another term, George W. Bush continued to approach contemporary American history through the defining moment of the September 11, 2001 attacks: “For a half century, America defended our own freedom by standing watch on distant borders. After the shipwreck of communism came years of relative quiet, years of repose, years of sabbatical - and then there came a day of fire” (NPR 2005). The consequent vicious ‘war on terror’ caused the deployment of thousands to protect American borders overseas, a sacrifice which Bush made sure not to overlook in his speech at the time: “A few Americans have accepted the hardest duties in this cause […] the dangerous and necessary work of fighting our enemies. Some have shown their devotion to our country in deaths that honored their whole lives - and we will always honor their names and their sacrifice” (NPR 2005). Although the “names” and “sacrifices” – i.e. the mere announcement of the death – of such soldiers would occasionally be remembered and cherished, what the US president – as many others – unmistakably overlooks is recognizing the ‘stories’ of such individuals: regarding them as citizens with fully rounded lives to appreciate, and not just names engraved on granite walls and plaques exhibited during memorials. Nevertheless, several of “those in uniform” choose to narrate their own stories instead during their military service away from their homeland using the distinctive literary and media platform of the blogosphere; in particular, this paper examines the blogs “My War: Killing Time in Iraq” by

* Assistant Lecturer in the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University. This paper is derived from her Ph.D. thesis in-progress, entitled “Individual Narratives as Cultural Interventions: A Study of Selected Blogs” (Cairo University), supervised by Prof. Randa Abou Bakr.
Cairo Studies in English 2020(2): https://cse.journals.ekb.eg/
Colby Buzzell, “Just Another Soldier” by Jason Hartley, and “A Soldier’s Thoughts” by Zach. Based on Raymond Williams’ notion of “emerging alternative culture” and Robert M. Strozier’s theoretical examination of the subject/ed, this paper studies how such self-narratives construct their writers’ subjectivities while simultaneously deconstructing the patterns of hegemonic discourse often disseminated in mainstream media outlets.

Creating “diaries” online

The desire to freely express oneself seems innate in human nature. In almost any given community across history, written recordings -- ranging from early cave scribblings until our modern print and digital documents -- by individuals who strive to both voice and record their own thoughts and feelings as well as share them with their communities could be significantly traced. In cases when such surrounding societies prove stifling through posing any sort of restrictions onto the individual, the latter’s yearning towards self-expression is often reciprocally intensified. Trying to understand the motives behind such instinctive inclinations, Pierre Bourdieu explains:

Writing abolishes the determinations, constraints and limits which are constitutive of social existence: to exist socially means to occupy a determined position in the social structure and to bear the marks of it, especially in the form of verbal automatisms or mental mechanisms; it also means to depend on, to hold to and to be held by, in short, to belong to groups and be enclosed in networks of relations which have objectivity, opacity and permanency, and which show themselves in the form of obligations, debts, duties […] in short controls and constraints. (1996, 27; italics in original)

Thus, writing as activity is primarily geared towards fulfilling one’s deep-rooted tendency for self-expression and liberation against a restraining social existence as an act of resistance and self-assertion, an instinctive reaction which Karl Weintraub attributes to the fact that “we are captivated by an uncanny sense that each one of us constitutes one irreplaceable human form, and we perceive a noble life task in the cultivation of our individuality, our ineffable self” (qtd. in Anderson 2010, 4). Life writings, in particular, are primarily concerned with the self as Philippe Lejeune defines the genre being any “retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular the story of his personality” (qtd. in Smyth 2016,
2). Therefore, venturing to “document” their own version of reality experienced firsthand as well as share such self-narratives amongst a broad spectrum of readers -- in this case, a global audience of internet users -- the American soldiers/bloggers under study -- through creating new modes of representing selfhood and subjectivity -- profoundly contribute to the shaping of the contemporary American literary and cultural scene.

Although culture, in the first place, is a problematic term to define given its diverse facets in society, Raymond Williams offers a definition from a “documentary” perspective; one that could be regarded as the body of intellectual and imaginative work, in which, in a detailed way, human thought and experience are variously recorded. The analysis of culture, from such a definition, is the activity of criticism, by which the nature of thought and experience, the details of the language, form and convention in which these are active, are described and valued. Such criticism […] seeks to relate them [i.e. the works] to the particular traditions and societies in which they appeared. (2003, 28; italics mine)

In modern culture, in particular, a huge body of documentation takes place through online media in an accelerated rate, given not only the ever-developing facilities that technology offers every day but also the increasing rates of accessibility worldwide. According to the latest statistics by the United Nations’ agency for Information Technologies in 2019, over 53 % of the world’s population has access to Internet services with, more specifically, “70 per cent of the world’s youth being online” (Sanou 2017, n. pag.). Hence, new writing “forms” have consequently arisen, creating their own remarkably growing audiences. Furthermore, this, inevitably, creates new dynamics in literary writings in specific as Williams observes that from a “historical perspective . . . the crisis of literature in the second half of the twentieth century is due to changing processes and relationships, changes in the publishing industry, and other forms of communication. […] This is not only a matter of new technologies but one of deep changes in social organization and social practice” (qtd. in O’Connor 2006, 82). Therefore, online written productions have rapidly gained popularity lately, having the internet as an alternative venue away from the many restrictions of the traditional publishing system.

Although digital literary production has undeniably proliferated in the last two decades, on a yet closer look, however, it is almost instantly noticeable how
a large body of produced content relies on narratives of the self. This is only a natural outcome given how intrinsic individuality is to the usage of new media: “In the more media studies-inflected end of literary studies there has also emerged work regarding nonfiction bloggers and identity-construction via interaction on social media. Yet, such works hew closer to life-writing modes of analysis than fiction-based models” (Murray 2018, 28). The inclination users find towards narrating their everyday life experiences helps them assert their distinctive individualities within their communities through free and direct self-expression. This is significantly in line with the opportunities the digital sphere offers for users to freely present and shape their individualities in any way they would create for themselves:

The burgeoning of online self-expression is shaping new projects of self-presentation. Some, such as blogs, adapt written genres of self-writing. Other mixed-media forms such as social networking sites generate composite modes of digital life narrative. Yet others, such as massively multiplayer online games, use avatars that allow users to reimagine themselves -- with different gender, ethnicity, and/or bodily features. (Smith and Watson 2010, 183)

Thus, one distinctive mode of writing online is a blog, which allows its writers to remodel their own identities while celebrating their newly found personal spaces in a virtual world, often lacking in the real one.

Blogs date back to the late 1990s after which they have become “so widely recognized that Merriam-Webster listed blog as its Word of the Year in 2004” (Andrews 2007, 51). Writers preferred the blogosphere because with “little technical background” and “generally at no cost” (51) they could create their own personal blogs where they could express themselves freely and receive feedback from their audience as well without any forms of constraint or censorship. Therefore, this study aims at examining blogs as alternative media and a powerful agent shaping today’s popular culture.

**Individual Agency**

Like ‘culture,’ popular culture is, similarly, challenging to define; however, one influential interpretation of the term is offered by John Fiske, highlighting, above all, the resistive quality of popular culture: “[it] is the culture of the subordinated and disempowered and thus always bears within it signs of power relations, traces of the forces of domination and subordination that are central to
our social system and therefore to our social experience. Equally, it shows signs of resisting or evading these forces” (2010, 4). Therefore, the blogs under study will be primarily examined in light of what Raymond Williams refers to as ‘emergent’ alternative culture:

By ‘emergent’ I mean, first, that new meanings and values, new practices, new significances and experiences, are continually being created. But there is then a much earlier attempt to incorporate them, just because they are part -- and yet not a defined part -- of effective contemporary practice. Indeed it is significant in our own period how very early this attempt is, how alert the dominant culture is to anything that can be seen as emergent. (Williams 1980, 41)

Thus, the resistive quality of the blogs is inarguably foregrounded as their authors refuse to accept the views spread via mainstream media as ‘the’ only acceptable representation of reality despite the censorship often imposed by dominant power structures; on the contrary, they exert significant individual effort in order to find for themselves other perspectives to reality and share it with a worldwide audience whom they passionately await its interaction in return.

In his blog “A Soldier’s Thoughts,” an Infantry sergeant named Zach who also served as an Arabic translator in Iraq chooses to foreground an introductory “disclaimer” to his readers on the front page asserting, “ALL opinions expressed on this blog are those of myself in my private capacity and not as a representative of the DoD [Department of Defense], DA [Department of the Army], or any particular element of the Government” (n. pag.). Yearning for individual self-expression, Zach’s posts are mostly blunt, first-hand experiences of the war in which he criticizes the indifference of power structures to the lives wasted in futile bloodshed. In a post dated July 18, 2006, and with a satirically interrogative title “This is OUR world?”, Zach blames policy makers for the violence he witnesses against civilians:

The way I see it we need to be getting out of Iraq, and fast. […] We cannot control that country with our backward politicking and poor planning. Unfortunately it is not the soldiers and paramilitary organizations taking the brunt of the attacks, instead it is the civilians (aka non-combatants). Yeah, we aren't the ones doing the targeting of civilians but what can we do if we cannot stop the violence against
them, should we stay there and let it get so much worse because of our occupation? […] What is a country to do? I believe that to be a true patriot you must not allow wrongful decisions to continue to be made […] As we look at our future in Iraq we realize that we are there for the long haul because someone doesn't want to even think about a possible timeline of withdrawal. (Zach 2006, “This is OUR world?”)

The new meanings and significances being constantly created which Williams refers to as one of the major tenents within an “emerging” cultural product are evident through Zach’s inquisitively confrontational attitude towards decision makers responsible for his intolerable existence. His defiant language is a stark criticism of an alternatively complacent mainstream discourse which often validates and consolidates such indifferent attitudes towards individuals. In another post entitled, “A Short Walk Through My Thoughts,” published January 26, 2006, Zach, on a more reflective note, gives voice to his silenced apprehensions:

I don't know why I chose this story to write about but my thoughts often turn to my friends who weren't as fortunate as me. Mayhap I have forgotten the face of my father but I think not. Things go slower here on the peaceful side but don't ever let that fool you, for like a river through a valley the politicians are constantly wearing away our rights through the patriot act and other such things. Just look at how they deny death benefits for those soldiers who had to purchase their own body armor due to shortages. (Zach 2006, “A Short Walk”)

Similarly, the sarcastic remarks implied within are again a powerful stance towards appreciating and memorializing the individual lives of those whom media conglomerates would hardly ever recognize as worthy of attention, but who, on the contrary, are foregrounded in a blogger’s narratives as the major criterion upon which war is to be continued or put to an end. An inside view of how things are on the ground as well as the intricate details of people’s existence is highlighted in a resistive move against a seemingly systematic disdain to the worth of every individual life.

However, in a more vicious reaction persistently waged by a negligent power structure, censorship is a major impediment to such individual narratives that give voice to the more voiceless, and often silenced, sectors of a community. In
his blog “My War: Killing Time in Iraq,” Colby Buzzell, not just a soldier, but a journalist by profession as well, starts communicating his experiences while serving in Iraq since 2004. His posts are an unapologetic criticism of several mainstream narratives that impose specific representations of the reality of the ongoing war while discrediting others. Instead of defending his homeland against some prescribed enemies, he only finds himself deserted in a foreign land, struggling with the heaviness of ongoing violence. While venturing to communicate such a view to his readership, the “alertness” of a dominant culture as Williams describes at once hinders such a process in the form of direct censoring: “I noticed there were some media reports and the Army was saying, ‘We’re not trying to censor soldiers and they have freedom of speech,’ […] And I was like, ‘No, they don’t. That’s full of crap. Soldiers don’t have freedom of speech’” (Buzzell 2006). Lack of transparency is equally extended to include mainstream media platforms of which Buzzell’s first hand experience introduces him to the selective versions of reality that such corporates choose to disseminate: “I’m a journalist; I work [so hard] to try to be objective. But it’s hard to say that CNN is objective, the New York Times is objective, when I have been there and observed the same thing come out as a totally different story. It’s hard to say the national media is always objective” (Buzzell 2006). Such posts have caused the blogger’s narratives to be abruptly cut off at times. Another soldier blogger, Minnick -- who considers Buzzell “the Rosa Parks of milblogging” -- comments on the reactions to such suppressive acts asserting: “it was a very sad deal. Nobody wanted to see that happen—everybody even within the ranks. I was there, I heard the meetings and things that were said about him. Everybody thought what he was doing was good for the Army and was especially good for people back home. He brought a side of war that people didn’t get to see. The way he wrote was so present tense and it was so free from editing or censorship. […] They didn’t know how to contain him, so they just stopped him” (qtd. in Buzzell 2006).

Hence, focusing on blogs as an efficient online media platform, Chris Atton argues that alternative media at large is “crucially about offering the means for democratic communication to people who are normally excluded from media production. They are to do with organizing media along lines that enable participation and reflexivity” (Atton 2002, 4). Therefore, in minimizing censorship and publishing constraints as well as instantly connecting bloggers with internet users, the blogosphere acts as a competent substitute to traditional media ensuring higher levels of transparency and immediacy in dealing with its audience through the interactive qualities offered by Web 2.0 (i.e. internet with
user-generated content). In brief, Atton highlights three terms introduced by Raymond Williams concerning “democratic communication” and which Atton believes are essential in appreciating the role of alternative media productions: “decapitalization, deprofessionalization and deinstitutionalization” (Atton 2002, 4). In other words, produced at almost no cost by ordinary individuals in society, alternative media is a notable venue for self-expression and the dissemination of views and knowledge. Atton also introduces the term ‘alternative internet’ through which he assumes that blogging sites “may not actually present politically charged content, but their manner of collecting and circulating information construct a process and content that are alternative to the mainstream of corporate conglomerates” (qtd. in Atkinson 2010, 18). Moreover, since “most blogging is to some extent self-representational, and as such a form of life-writing and autobiography” (Rettberg 2008, 111), blogosphere narratives are, therefore, in essence an enhancement of the construction of subjectivity of such bloggers within their own communities through the delineation of personal incidents that give readers a closer insight into the lives of individuals that are often forgotten or overlooked.

**The Construction of Subjectivity**

Referring to the exclusive existence of each human life and its instinctive inclination towards self-assertion and realization, the terms “subjectivity” and “individuality” are often used interchangeably; however, a more profound, and etymologically driven enquiry easily uncovers a world of difference between both terms. In his seminal book, *Foucault, Subjectivity, and Identity: Historical Constructions of Subject*, Robert M. Strozier explains how Michel Foucault understands the term “individual”, derived from the Latin *individuum*, to simply signify the singularity of one’s physical existence or, more specifically, “the human material entity (including mind); … the stage prior to becoming a subject, that is, a cultural subject” (Strozier 2002, 9). Thus, Strozier offers, on the other hand, an extensive dissection of the word “subject” which goes back to the Latin verb *subicio* or *subjicio* literally meaning “to place near or under” (11). Ironically, however, two juxtaposed substantives have been derived from this same verb.

First, *subjectum* meaning “that which is spoken of, the foundation or subject of a proposition” -- that is, that which has *already* been placed under” (Strozier 2002, 11). According to this definition, the notion of the subject is regarded as “a foundation or as an origin of thought, action and change. This subject is the a priori, the pre-existent platform or basis from which thought, action, and reaction
emerge” (11); thus, such an understanding essentially promotes the agency of each individual within their social surroundings, viewing them as influential subjects. Second, subjectus, derived from the past participle referring to “an inferior, subject’ -- that is, subject-ed or subjected to something prior” which, on the contrary, assumes that the subject is, in fact, the outcome of “some enculturating process” which lends individuals a rather passive role in shaping their own milieus. In other words, the former subject is a given that is able to produce culture and knowledge, while the latter is produced by culture (10-11). Thus, in light of such a dichotomy, the bloggers’ life-writings could efficiently serve as a means towards reconciling both seemingly conflicting roles that are inevitably embedded within the bloggers’ existences as social subjects. Their personal narratives are, above all, a declaration of their unique and distinctive life experiences through which each writer’s subjectivity is solidly constructed within an extended global society, -- i.e. the blogosphere -- attempting to resist dominant cultural practices enforced by hegemonic socio-political discourse.

Thus, trying to understand the dynamics shaping the relationship between subjectivity and its role in defining world culture is a necessary quest worthy of profound investigation, especially in its modern evolution. Pursuing a historical approach to understanding such a relation, Strozier continues to explain how Foucault’s view of the modern world stresses the shift that took place particularly after the 18th century: “with the ‘death of the king,’ real or supposed, a somewhat different version of this subject has emerged. Foucault argues that monarchy has given way in the modern age to a power-knowledge network of discourses … and disciplines … to which the modern individual is necessarily submitted in order to be produced as a cultural subject, […] a ‘discursive subject’” (Strozier 2002, 12). In other words, a modern “subject” is at once subjected to authoritative discourse and mindsets widely spread in society by certain powerful institutional entities, while simultaneously attempting to fiercely resist such forces through asserting one’s agency and influence. Therefore, although the subjectus is produced by being “brought under’ a disciplinary or cultural apparatus or ‘subjected to’” a dominant regime, the subjectum, on the other hand, entices individuals to function as the foundation or origin of subversive human action; to realize a “self-founding subjectivity” (12). This is based on the assumption viewing the subject as a unique existence: “we are self-founded as individual subjects or selves as a given. We actualize this potential by self-reflective insight: we have the capacity to stand outside ourselves, examine the cultural forces acting upon us, and to find our true selves in contrast to this alien other” (12).
Therefore, although the bloggers under study are all an embodiment of the “subjectus” by affiliation, they, nevertheless, succeed to go beyond that role and represent a newly founded “subjectum” in which their personal life-writings are an exploration of individual voice and worth. Several of their posts are self-reflective in essence, a scrutiny of their inner conflicting sentiments towards the ongoing war, a psychological inspection which further highlights the individualistic approach of their narratives. With the title “I Ask You,” Zach publishes a post where he seeks answers to his suffering conditions not only from his family members, readers, or society at large, but his own self in the first place:

Are you proud of me Mother? I am a soldier. Are you proud of me Father? I have killed. To my country I ask you, are you proud of me? […] These hands of mine know how to destroy and leave my mess for others to pick up. At times I feel that the only thing I have left behind me is a path of broken pieces. Perhaps that is my legacy, to shatter what others (including myself) hold dear. […] You know the best part? The sorrow and pity I feel afterwards. Isn't it ridiculous? You would think that I would be the last one to cry for the casualties I have helped cause. […] I am still alive and like all living things, with each breath I come closer to death. I walk this path alone and [have no idea] where it leads. (Zach 2005)

Similarly suffering from the ferocity of a ruthless battle taking place on the outside, Jason Hartley’s blog, “Just Another Soldier” yearns towards delineating a yet more vicious encounter with one’s own self. As he chooses to name his blog, Hartley’s focus is on the individual stories he witnesses firsthand, while being aware of how insignificant such stories are often regarded in mainstream media, he sarcastically refers to himself as just another one of those overlooked individuals. In a post published on April 24, 2004, and sarcastically entitled “I ♥ Dead Civilians,” Hartley intimately discloses to his readers one traumatic experience:

As I try to fathom what it must feel like to be a poverty-stricken eight-year-old girl and experience the epic pain of having your family suddenly and violently killed in front of you, I have to pause and ask myself, Now what am I doing here again? I know this kind of thing happens in combat and I kind of expected to see it, but Jesus,
the record is pretty bad so far. […] I’ve been stewing over this dead family thing for a couple weeks now. I’ve been painstakingly mulling over in my mind the things these insurgents do and the things we do and the unintuitive peculiarity of how the drive to be violent seems to precede the purpose to be violent and how rampant it is to meaninglessly develop one’s identity through injury, but frankly I don’t think I’ve figured it all out well enough yet to even kludge together a coherent line of thought. […] But what does any of this have to do with the dead family you ask? Well, nothing directly. It’s just another one of those things I’m having difficulty reconciling in my mind, I guess. (Hartley 2004; italics in the original)

Such posts are a remarkable reminder for readers of the narrative approaches of such mode of life-writing which is primarily geared towards empowering a passive “subjectus” into an actively represented “subjectum” through its perpetual endeavours to make sense of a seemingly senseless state of life. Therefore, emphasizing the subjective nature of the self-writings, Sean Dustman, also a milblogger, proclaims: “Don't attach stereotypes to us. Military members come from all walks of life and we have different outlooks on the world at large. I believe my core values will hold up with the best of them. I'm a complex person, just like the rest of you. I don't always agree with our missions but I signed on the dotted line and once my name was on that piece of paper, when the brass says jump, I say how high. … I don't attack people but I do attack ideas” (Dustman 2004). Hence, the bloggers are in constant spontaneous communication with their audience to which they try to delineate not only what they witness firsthand, but, more importantly, how they are not to be stripped of their citizenship rights -- for merely being in service overseas -- as any of those who are still back home. Since “no other military in world history has been deployed as widely as that of the US,” according to the Heritage Foundation reports (qtd. in Smith 2012, 368), the bloggers resist attempts to overlooking them as American citizens into the stereotypical representations affiliated to them as mechanical representatives of collectivism or homogeneity.

**Beyond the “dog tags”**

Focusing on the importance of citizenship as a pronouncement of individual autonomy, Etienne Balibar regards what he termed the ‘citizen subject’ or ‘the political subject’ as an influential agent that could actively affect change in modern society. Despite being exposed to certain socio-political power
structures, individuals could still, nevertheless, preserve their rights of self-assertion and independence as stipulated by their citizenship status:

If the individual is necessarily both citizen and subject, this necessity is inscribed in the fact that he is subject not to the will of another but to a law of which he as citizen is the maker. Because the sovereign is made up of all individuals in a condition of association, every one equal to every other one, equally ‘above’ the law as its maker and under it as a legal subject, the citizen’s relation to the law is one of immanence: the activity of the citizen (the making of law) is one and the same thing as the citizen’s passivity (obedience to the law). The immanence of this relation (or even this antimony) vanishes as soon as inequality appears, even if it applies only to the person of the sovereign who would then become the only citizen in a world of subjects. (Montag and Elsayed 2017, n. pag.)

The repercussions of such a disturbance and “inequality” are what inevitably drive individuals to activate their roles as resistive agents against threats of discrimination or hegemony. Among the diverse facets of resistance chosen by individuals to emphasize their subjectivities in the face of institutional dominance is the personal documentation of life experiences and “subjective” views and sharing them amongst other members of the society. Thus, the resistance often achieved by blogging reserves the genre a special position in “citizen media” which is defined by Mona Baker and Bolette B. Blaagaard as one that

encompasses the physical artefacts, digital content, practices, performative interventions and discursive formations of affective sociality produced by unaffiliated citizens as they act in public space(s) to effect aesthetic or socio-political change or express personal desires and aspirations, without the involvement of a third party or benefactor. […] It also comprises the sets of values and agendas that influence and drive the practices and discourses through which individuals and collectives position themselves within and in relation to society and participate in the creation of diverse publics. (2016, 16)
Baker and Blaagard formulate this definition in light of the Habermasian principle of the “public sphere” which is a realm in which people “may freely engage in debate about issues that concern them, and where ‘access’ is guaranteed to all citizens” (Baker et al. 2016, 3). Thus, the blog as a digitized form of self-narratives that allows both writers and their readers such access and potential for debate proves itself as a democratic public sphere that enhances its citizens’ agency and assertion of their individualities:

The impact of digitization, online interaction and mobile media in recent years [...] [proves] that the public and systemic spheres are discursively interlinked. [...] Unaffiliated individuals may now engage in political conversation as easily as Members of Parliament and can cumulatively shift the ‘systemic’ agenda by posting photographs and comments or by recording and uploading visual records of a first-hand experience using their mobile devices. This multiplicity of voices and tenors, technologies and media platforms, inevitably challenges the idea of the public sphere as one unifying space. (2016, 4)

Resistance extends even to blogs’ generic function as it opens up new arenas to literary writings of the self, away from the restrictive sphere of print publications; they are an effective way “of harnessing the power of digital self-publishing to rescue literature from the hierarchical and tightly patrolled world of print and to move it into the mainstream of contemporary online life” (Hammond 2016, 142). Therefore, examining blogs as cultural products is essential in understanding its role in shaping media nowadays. In his seminal work, Firing Back: Against the Tyranny of the Market, Pierre Bourdieu explains how traditional media ‘products’ are often culturally and economically manipulated:

Far from promoting diversity, competition breeds homogeneity. The pursuit of audience ratings leads producers to look for omnibus products that can be consumed by audiences of all backgrounds in all countries because they are weakly differentiated and differentiating. [...] The key point, however, is that commercial concerns, the pursuit of maximum short term profit and the ‘aesthetic’ that derives from that pursuit, are being ever more intensely and widely imposed on cultural production. The
consequences of such a policy are exactly the same in the field of publishing, where very high concentration of ownership is also found.” (2003, 68-9; italics in original)

Thus, blogs could serve as an efficient alternative that promotes self-assertion against a vicious constraining ‘market’ through offering writers the chance to voice their personal opinions and narratives to a world-wide audience.

**Idiosyncratic Features of Blogosphere Narratives**

Axel Bruns’ analysis of the rise of the Internet as a mass medium, unlike previous mass media, introduces several challenges to the traditional, industrial model of information production and distribution (2008, 13). First, an obvious difference is evident in terms of the mechanism of access itself; access to digitized information sources “takes place on an information-pull basis rather than the product-push model of the traditional broadcast and print mass media” (13). Second, individuals getting access to the means of producing and distributing such information is another major factor where its availability facilitates the users’ public sharing of their personal narratives: “rather than limited to a small number of operators … consumers themselves can now become active producers and distributors of information” (13). Therefore, usage of the internet is often referred to as ‘produsage’ as an amalgamation of the roles of both ‘producers’ and ‘users’ is manifested; both now function as “nodes in a neutral network and communicate with one another on an equal level. … This is particularly empowering for users, who now have access to a greater range of tools to network and build communities among themselves, away from the top-down mediated spaces of the traditional mediaspheres” (14). Third, audience participation is exclusively and instantly offered as well since internet technology “enables peer-to-peer modes of organizing the collaborative engagement of communities in shared projects: this means that users can now communicate and engage directly with one another on a global scale, entirely bypassing traditional producers and distributors of information” (13). This facility helps activist bloggers, for instance, immensely in communicating their self-narratives to a global audience which could further promote their causes at a larger scale. Finally, Bruns highlights a quality of digital technology as a cultural product, adding that “in its digital form, content (whether representing information, knowledge, or creative work) is easily and rapidly shareable … this means that the term ‘consumption’ in its conventional sense no longer applies, as digital information is a non-rival good which is not consumed (used *up*) as it
Crossing Borders in Uniform

is used” (2008, 13-4; italics in original). Therefore, economically, digitized media genres have formed a “networked,” instead of an “industrial,” information economy with the latter majorly efficient, since the second half of the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century (14). Thus, this new economy is primarily characterized by “decentralized individual action” and, more specifically, “new and important cooperative and coordinate action carried out through radically distributed, non-market mechanisms that do not depend on propriety strategies” (Benkler 2006, n. pag.). Blogging, therefore, is resistive to several constraining social and economic norms in both form and content.

Moreover, the act of narration itself has its own distinctive features in blogs. First and foremost, it is often episodic and incoherent since it stems from the writer’s spontaneous urge towards documenting everyday life experiences: “In blogs, the reader usually does not find complete stories with a beginning and an end; rather they tend to resemble more of a column or a short story. Typical blog texts take the form of self-expression and consist of informal descriptions of thoughts or events and do not have a thoroughly planned plot” (Lenze 2018, 18).

Hence, a conscious and attentive reader is required to be able to create a vital interactive experience with the bloggers. This in turn sheds light on another essential feature exclusive to blogging, namely social interaction. Its inherent potential towards an active participation amongst its agents, both writers and readers, dismisses the element of a passively receptive audience present in earlier forms of self-narratives; “airing deeply personal experiences and thoughts … [t]he majority of blogs, however, are unlike online diaries in that they are interactive sites for communities that allow users to comment by raising questions, offering the comfort of shared experience” (Smith and Watson 2010, 183). The rewards of such interaction are sensed not only by bloggers but by the site’s visitors. “The consumption of others’ ‘real’ lives fulfills a need for people to enter into the lives of others, to ‘try’ on various identities, to understand one’s own identity, and to confirm and affirm one’s own life experiences” (Rodrigue 2012, 39). Third, most blogs make use of multimedia facilities including images, hyperlinks, videos and sound bites to mention some (36). This multimodality comments on the increasing popularity of the genre as well as the richness of the blogging experience at large:

Some blogs are more than just a listing of items; they have an interactive feel to them. Perhaps there is a marquee with news items scrolling or perhaps certain popular entries are highlighted and being rotated through cyclically. On some blogs it may be possible to rate
items, and this rating can serve as a measure of the popularity of an entry. [...] The number of tweets made about an entry could also be factored into such a rating. (Rodrigue 2012, 37)

Finally, the liberty that users experience while freely voicing their personal opinions is remarkably evident through both the production of, and feedback towards, the delineated narratives by both writers and audience respectively; as a result, an ‘uncensored’ version of the self is revealed:

All bloggers highlight the freedom of letting out what bothers them or makes them happy as a highly rewarding feature of their blogging practice. In addition, another internal reward is the strengthening of the bloggers’ self-reflectivity. Externalising and trying to formulate thoughts for the blog offers the possibility to become more self-critical. (Jurkiewicz 2018, 211)

Therefore, such unique idiosyncratic elements of blogging help writers, and audience, immensely towards asserting their own individualities inside society. The yearning for freedom, which at times necessitates rebellion against constraining social norms, is what emphasizes the resistive quality of blogs. The genre provides writers with a liberal space where they could bring up, comment on, narrate, or interactively discuss any topic regardless of its sensitivity. Such blogs encourage the sharing of self-experience and promote a view of the self as flexible, responsive, and dynamic. They enable users “in remote areas to discuss [issues] which may promote greater education and foster resistance to repressive community norms” (Smith and Watson 2010, 184). Therefore, blogging has been connected in different ways to social and political activism; several self-narrative bloggers employ the genre to promote their personal stands believing that both “blogging and activism display a set of similar practices, such as writing, discussing or disseminating ideas and arguments for specific causes” (Jurkiewicz 2018, 202). An inevitable inclination towards journalistic writing often is the case, consequently, because activist bloggers do not merely narrate their own lived experiences, or their personal view of certain incidents, but they also necessarily report those specific incidents which they witness first-hand to their readers; even though it is ‘their’ own version of reality, every account, nevertheless, is essential in providing a holistic picture of any given event while taking into account diverse viewpoints of the individuals involved. This act of both reporting and commenting on incidents allows bloggers to expand their
readership since “articles can be posted on the blog and thus be used for promoting the blogger’s journalistic writings” (Jurkiewicz 2018, 204). Moreover, blogging could further intersect with the sphere of journalism, since both primarily depend on written text to communicate with their audience, thus each genre mutually enriching the other: “blogging is also a catalyst for writing. [...] Constantly writing for and publishing on the blog provides exercise in writing as the basic journalistic skill” (204). Therefore, several bloggers evolve their writings into books such as Colby Buzzell who also published two books My War: Killing Time in Iraq (2006), and Lost in America: A Dead-End Journey (2011) or Jason Hartley’s Just Another Soldier: A Year on the Ground in Iraq (2009).

Despite the multitude of American blogosphere narratives created in the aftermath of 9/11 that is beyond any single study or examination, the search for subjectivity as well as the resistive approaches to the different types of hegemony, censorship, or patronizing, are at the core of the majority of such digital cultural products. Therefore, the yearning towards exploring different versions of reality other than those imposed by mainstream alternatives might be summed up in what Paul Woodward, a British journalist, living in the United States, proposes in his blog “War in Context: with attention to the unseen” where he explains:

After 9/11, the Middle East – seen through American eyes inflamed by fear and anger – took on an amorphous, undifferentiated otherness. The threat was called “terrorism” but really it was the unknown. And because we couldn’t isolate it, suddenly it seemed to be everywhere. [...] War in Context, from its inception, has been an effort to apply critical intelligence in an arena where political judgment has repeatedly been twisted by blind emotions. It presupposes that a world out of balance will inevitably be a world in conflict. (Woodward 2002)

Thus, forming this blog as a personal initiative attempting to scrupulously study overlooked details in stories conveyed by most media corporations -- hence giving “attention to the unseen” -- is an act of resistance against political and cultural hegemony, and an alternative venue where impartial audiences could find different perspectives to events based on the blogger’s first-hand experiences or his individual, disinterested research in analyzing often perplexing current events. Woodward’s endeavour, among others, was
noticeably appreciated by the American public who followed blogs closely, during post 9/11 military actions. Upon studying such an inclination, it was noted that although “individual blogs are not always the ultimate in terms of neutrality and objectivity, but, exactly because of their specificity, engagement, and subjectivity, they are able to challenge hegemonic representations and discourses and articulate a more personal and, some would claim, a more genuine account of war” (Bailey et al. 2007, 151).

Works Cited


Emerging Voices

Life-Writing and Autofiction in Radwa Ashour’s The Journey

Fatma Massoud*

Introduction

This paper investigates the challenging conceptions of life-writing’s generic identity, developing from the intersection and interweaving of the modes of Autofiction, History, Memory and Travel-writing. The study focuses on the Egyptian author, Radwa Ashour’s (1946-2014) autobiographical text, al-Rihla (originally published in Arabic in 1983 and translated into English as The Journey: Memoirs of an Egyptian Woman Student in America by Michelle Hartman in 2018). The Journey is a life narrative that recounts the author’s three-year journey to the United States to study for her PhD degree in the USA, at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, in the mid-1970s. Ashour’s text has been studied mainly for its direct engagement with public and private History, her unconcealed agency in ‘historicizing’ events and contexts, creating a counter-history that offers a parallel historical narrative, and the author’s development/culmination of her subjectivity as an Arab woman on a United States university campus.1 However, very few scholarly investigations have been done on the generic identity of the text, since The Journey has long been strictly categorized as an ‘autobiography’ by Ashour herself, and it was critically approached for a long time as such. More recently, it has been translated into English as a ‘memoir’, a generic labeling assumed in the sub-title by Ashour’s translator Michelle Hartman (although the Arabic title does not mention ‘memoir,’ but says, ‘days’ instead). In her “translator’s note,” Hartman referred to the ‘memoir,’ being “a book of its time and place and itself chooses what to and what not to explain” (2018, 148). Highlighting the distinctions between these

* Assistant Lecturer in English, The British University in Egypt (BUE). This paper is derived from her Ph.D. thesis in-progress, entitled “Autofiction in Selected Works by Radwa Ashour and Doris Lessing” (Cairo University), supervised by Prof. Hoda Gindi and Prof. Hala Kamal.

Cairo Studies in English 2020(2): https://cse.journals.ekb.eg/
different types of life narratives leads to a better understanding of the nature of the text and foregrounds a basis for approaching it critically.

The French theorist Phillipe Lejeune understands an autobiography as “the retrospective narrative in prose that someone makes of his own existence when he puts the principal accent upon his life, especially upon the story of his own personality” (1982, 193). As an established genre, Autobiography historically started out as a way to write about one’s life in a confessional frame, and included reflections and speculations about history, politics, religion, science, and culture (Smith and Watson 2001, 2), commonly written to trace the beginning of the author’s life up to the point of writing. More sub-genres were also developed under the umbrella of life narratives like memoirs, which Linda Anderson distinguishes from Autobiography as being “more flexible and outward-looking,” in the sense that they allow the author to recount life events of a specific experience, and can focus on “any episode” from his/her life (2011, 113). Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson also make distinctions between life-writing and life-narratives: “life writing as a general term for writing of diverse kinds that takes a life as its subject. Such writing can be biographical, novelistic, historical, or an explicit self-reference to the writer. We understand Life-Narrative as a somewhat narrower term that includes many kinds of self-referential writing, including autobiography” (2001, 3). Both critics also highlighted the inadequacy of Autobiography to encompass the complexity of self-referential writing practice, stating that “a growing number of postmodern and postcolonial theorists contend that the term autobiography is inadequate to describe the extensive historical range and the diverse genres and practices of Life-Narratives and life narrators in the West and elsewhere around the globe” (2001, 4).

Therefore, one of the expansions in the theoretical approaches under Autobiography Studies, which addresses these problematic issues, is the emerging field of Autofiction. This is why, this paper will expand beyond the limitations of these definitions and trace the intersections of both Autofiction as a relatively recently theorized generic category and travel-writing as a form of life-writing. I will attempt to read The Journey in light of such intersections, where I believe the text is disrupting the specificity of its generic labeling as an autobiographical text, and examining the parameters that it functions within, as a travelogue with historicized and autofictional elements. Such crossing of generic borders is possible in the text because of the complexity of the issues it problematizes – the experience of an academic Arab woman travelling alone in the United States, who gets exposed to the ‘American’ experience that propels
the author to reflect on herself and on life, in a setting complicated by history, race, politics and gender.

This paper is divided into three sections. The first one traces the autofictional dimension in The Journey that blurs the boundaries of genre, and explores new possibilities of reading the text as a more inclusionary life narrative, where Autofiction could be ground for bringing together Travel, History, Autobiography, and Fiction all together. The second mode is how Autofiction, both as a potential genre and as a technique, allows the effectuation of ‘historicization’ as a tool for conceptualizing Ashour’s life and ‘self,’ and how memory plays a vital role in mediating such process, stressing Ashour’s ‘relationality’ to her surroundings on the course of her ‘American’ journey. The third and final mode is reading The Journey as a Travel text that she wrote to ‘record’ her adventures as an Arab, Muslim woman on a three-year journey in the ‘West’ represented by America. However, dealing with the Travel theme and structure in this text is mainly highlighted to investigate the validity of using Travel-writing as a tool for life-writing, and the implications of such use.

**Autofiction as Genre and Technique in The Journey**

The constant expansion of the parameters of life-writing allows Autobiography Studies to be inclusionary of more sub-genres and types of life narratives as they develop and flourish. One such recent development is the emergence of theorizing of Autofiction as a more encompassing platform of life-writing than other forms. Autofiction is a term coined by French writer Serge Doubrovsky in 1977, mainly to refer to an autobiography with fictionalized elements, or “fiction of strictly real events” (Dix 2018, 2). According to Karen Fererra-Meyers, Doubrovsky’s initial understanding of autofiction is to describe “a narrative which has a strictly autobiographical subject matter (certified by the nominal shared identity between author, narrator and main character), but whose manner, that is the narrative organization and stylistic craft, is novel-like” (2018, 28). She also highlights the difference between Autobiography and Autofiction, noting that “whereas traditional autobiography tries to describe a character which really existed in the most realistic and effective way possible, autofiction fictionalizes a character which really lived. That is the pragmatic point of view regarding autofiction raised by Doubrovsky in 1977” (2015, 205). Part of the ongoing debate between Autofiction theorists concerns exploring the limits of the demarcation of generic boundaries. Theorists of Autofiction like Eliane Lecarme-Tabone made contributions to how critics can approach the ‘autofictional text’, and define its elements as a “narrative in the first person.
singular, with agreement of the names of the narrator/the author, but with all the signs of fiction’s implausibility” (Lecarme-Tabone qtd in Ferreira-Meyers 2018, 29). As opposed to Lejeune’s idea of creating an implied ‘contract’ of authenticity with the readers of autobiography, Jacques Lecarme suggested an “autofictional pact” (1993, 242) instead, because he questioned the ability of aligning the author, protagonist and narrator to strictly identify with each other, and negated the possibility for autobiographical writing to mediate historical events in a way that is not narrativized, and therefore fictionalized. This pact attempts to resolve the tension between saying the ‘truth’ in a factual manner, and using narrative, fictive techniques.

Lecarme and Eliane Lecarme-Tabone’s contributions were beneficial in the way they allowed ‘autofiction’ as a term to be transnational and not exclusively used in one part of the world. The two distinctions they made in theorizing the nature of Autofiction was twofold: autofiction depending on ‘real’ events that are narrated in fictionalized narrative technique, and more widely, autofiction as a technique that blends imagination with memory (Fererra-Meyers 2018, 29). Furthermore, other critics explained autofiction as an “exploration of the different layers of the self” (qtd in Ferreira-Meyers 2018, 29) because it constitutes a “quest” for authors who seek to interpret life’s elusiveness and indescribability, and then it becomes a project of “self-exploration and self experimentation on the part of the author” (Dix 2018, 4).

In her essay “My Experience with Writing,” Ashour progressively describes the nature of her text in the same light:

*The Journey* was a full length text, but it was the result of an experience that I had lived through and people that I knew. Of course I influenced the arrangement of the material and the conclusions drawn therein, both implicitly and explicitly. But I did not invent any of the situations or characters that are portrayed in it. (1993, 174; my emphasis)

Such emphasis that blends both ‘factual’ events with literary narrative techniques, such as the “transposition of time, which allows for an incident lasting minutes to consume pages while a situation enduring for years can be written about in two lines,” (Ashour 1993, 173) or using a narrator to her recounted story, along with the shift in the voice of narration, in her use of first and then third person, or the internal experimentation, along with external exploration of new locales all offer a new light to reading *The Journey* as
Fatma Massoud

autofictional; thus, demarcating the fixities of genre and offering fresh interpretations to the author’s insight and experience. Such shifts in theoretical frameworks that deal with self-referential texts specifically, and literary and non-literary production more generally come from a substantially changed demographics, and the rise of post-colonial, anti-Eurocentric/Imperialist tendencies that allow more fluidity and fragmentation of ideas, concepts, and writing modes. Therefore, for the purposes of this paper, the debate of whether to consider Autofiction a legitimate genre is not as relevant here. However, the “concept” of Autofiction will be used as “as a lens through which to approach and explain writing styles” (Ferreira-Meyers 2018, 35).

The Journey’s generic categorization has always been assumed to be of autobiographical nature. Ashour wrote many texts that were generically categorized as ‘autobiographies’ or ‘autobiographical novels.’ She talks about the process of how she started infusing self-referential writing into her oeuvre. Life-writing for her was a means to gain the ‘courage’ to blend and reconcile the blatant dichotomies of the personal and the public, the Self and the Other, the individual and the collective. In her essay “My Experience with Writing,” she recounts the development of her writing style:

In 1980 I embarked upon an autobiographical project. I wrote pages on my life's experiences in the years between 1946 (the year when I was born) and 1956. I discovered that the threads which made up the consciousness of a ten-year-old girl, and those which wove the history of that period, were tighter and more closely interwoven than that which I was capable of writing on. I found myself stumbling when writing about the relationship between the personal and the general which were interlocked to a degree that made it difficult to distinguish one from the other. I was afraid of slipping into rhetoric or lyricism. The material that I was dealing with was not just personal experience, but also the history of the nation, and I stopped, feeling ill-equipped and fearful. I decided that I needed a workshop where I could train and learn. The writing of The Journey: An Egyptian Student’s Days in America was the workshop to which consciously I gave my attention, thinking of it as a workshop of preparation. (1993, 172-173)

This highlights her generic awareness of the problematic of “slipping into rhetoric and lyricism” as features of fictional writing, while she embarked on
writing her memoir. This is why, by rereading Ashour’s text as partly autofictional, it would solve such a problematic issue by allowing this mode of reading to substantiate and mediate self-referentiality, history and self-exploration without the fear of ‘slippery’ into fictional modes that she thought would sabotage the ‘authenticity’ of her text.

It is complicated to situate The Journey on the autofictional spectrum. Yet, one key point that autofiction poses for reading texts is the starting point – whether the texts are mostly autobiographical with autofictional elements, or vice versa, and whether autofiction can be used as a technique in texts with autobiographical nature. In this section, I will be focusing on examples of autofictional techniques used in the text. But in a more general sense, my analysis of the two subsequent modes of reading (that is History and Travel-writing) will substantiate my claim that the text can fall under Autofiction as a potential genre that encompasses various sub-genres and does not stop at or concern itself with the fixity of generic borders.

The Journey can be read as an autofictional text for its main employment of narrative and stylistic techniques of fiction in a text that has clear autobiographical features. For instance, the use of ‘memory’ as a technique of remembering events, which will be analyzed in the next section for its thematic significance, is one of the markers that reinforce the aspects of ‘fictionalization’ that Ashour deployed. The technique of using flashbacks from the ‘past’ and flashforwards, for example, probes this mode of reading the text as a fictionalized narrative. In remembering details of her past life as a young girl in Egypt, and infusing it with reflections on her ‘present’ moment in the American setting that is implicitly affected by that past, Ashour creates a background for her ‘protagonist’ just like an author would do within their ‘fiction’ writing:

I had learned to conquer my earliest childhood fears and was able to use every experience had to emerge with my head held high. I grew up with three brothers whom I always feared would be associated with bravery and courage because they while I would be associated with weakness and fear because I was not. So I used to plunge headlong into things. I would always be the one to reach out and take the first shot and then claim it didn't hurt […] I never squirmed when swallowing bitter medicine; I would swallow it with feigned calm, claiming that it wasn't so bitter. I would bet my eldest brother that I could carry as much as he could […] I didn't show my fear when I had to go into a dark room. I don't know exactly what traces this
childhood stubbornness and assertiveness left on my later behavior, but I know that I gained a measure of moral courage and bravery from it. In this American university where I was living and studying, however, I experienced an insistent fear for the first time since my very early childhood. Those Zionists succeeded in arousing a deep anxiety inside me. Would one of them attack me with a large bat and bash my head in? The violence in the look of that young guy from the Jewish Defense League made me wonder what kind of harm his hatred might translate to. America did not make me feel safe at all. (2018, 25)

The detailed description of her character traits as a child, and the narratological jump from her past memories as a child, where she felt safe both physically and emotionally to be herself and practice her stubbornness with little or no fear, to the present moment that posed a psychological as well as physical threat to her as an adult provides a literary and fictive resonance to her writing. Moreover, the process of ‘fictionalization’ here includes portraying a character that looks and sounds fictional even though it is ‘real’. Ashour represents her different versions of herself through Radwa the child, the young adult at home, and the adult in the US. Each one of these versions is given a voice, and a consciousness of her own.

Moreover, autofictional analysis subsumes the stylistics and formal aspects to make them integral in the text, which is also the marker of a fictionalized, imagined narrative. Ashour uses poetic language with vivid and detailed descriptions of her surroundings, relying on imagery and metaphors that enliven the scene she is portraying. The visual and olfactory sensations invoked by her description of the mesmerizing setting is compelling:

Spring had still not completely arrived in Amherst at the end of April. But then May came and the earth changed. The people of the town could enter warm, happy spaces with new green on the trees and the soft scent of lilacs wafting through the open windows. You could hardly smell it during the day but at night it filled the air. When winter is long, snow piles up on the ground and trees grow bare as if there is no hope life will ever return to them. A sunny spring day is as joyful as the birth of a child in a house where everyone else is elderly. (2018, 68)
Ashour also extensively deploys intertextual interjections of literature and poetry she makes Radwa recite as part of her state of continuous reflection and commentary on her present, which is one of the features of autofictional analysis of a text. *The Journey* is already a highly intertextual text. For instance, Radwa and Mourid comment on the morbid weather that pervaded New York on the day of their trip, reciting lines from T.S. Eliot’s *Wasteland*:

*Unreal city under the brown fog of a winter dawn.*
*I had not thought death had undone so many.*
*Unreal city under the gray fog of a summer dusk.*

The use of these verses from *The Waste Land* shows multiple levels of awareness. One of them is the author’s awareness of the importance of intertextuality in expressing the complexities of the past/present dichotomy. T.S. Eliot depicts a fragmented, gloomy sentiment about cities of Europe in a relatively near past, but it can be felt in a present moment across the continent, in New York. So, intertextuality can highlight and complicate the spatial and temporal dimensions in the text. The second one is the protagonist’s awareness of such dimensions, and her frequent commentary on it. Radwa infuses poetry, folk-narratives, and African American slave songs as a way of making sense of her own consciousness and existence through literature.

The deployment of these different narrative techniques in the text renders it to an autofictional reading that relies on the personal narrative of the author, who chose to write her version of the ‘truth’ about her journey in America, in a frame of ‘fictionalization’ of characters, events and setting; even with those three drawing from ‘real’ sources.

**History and Memory as tools of “Conceptualization of Existence”**

From the first chapter of *The Journey*, it is evident that Ashour employs what critic Bart Moore-Gilbert describes as the process of ‘pushing the text towards Historiography’ (2009, 59), while maintaining the balance of its core essence, being a personal life narrative. Moore-Gilbert notes that this is a distinctive feature of post-colonial women’s life-writing, mostly employed as a reaction to the stagnation of the traditional male autobiographical writing traditions, and the need to revisit history in a different light (2009, 22-23). In her essay, “Eyewitness, Scribe and Story Teller: My Experience as a Novelist,” Ashour reflects on the importance of (re)writing history in personal and public
endeavors: “‘Always historicize,’ Brecht once said. I do not historicize for ideological reasons but because I have no other means to conceptualize my existence and reconstruct it into meaningful categories” (2000, 88; my emphasis). So, ‘historicization’ here is an integral tool to (re)shaping the author’s - and by extension, many of post-colonial women writers’ – understanding of their existence and making sense of its complexities by writing about it and exploring its boundaries. Georg Misch, one of the early critics of Autobiography Studies, views self-referential writing as ‘personal history’ that encompasses more public forms of history, thus blurring the boundaries between the private/public dichotomy.

However, his view of autobiographical writing as a ‘high’ form of art when it tackles the conundrums of the “great man” (Smith and Watson 2001, 114) is dismissive of so many other forms of self-referential writing, done by minorities or disenfranchised groups like women, people of color, people coming from a post-colonial background, or combined all together. Moore-Gilbert, on the contrary, believes that self-referential writing can be used as a means to promoting new types of history “from below”, which seeks to make traditionally marginalized groups “more prominent as historical agents” (2009, 77). This is where Autofiction can reconcile such a problematic, by offering a flexible platform that can combine various ways and dimensions of self-expression. In that light, Ashour defies that limiting view, and explains that she chooses to ‘write’ as an act of:

self-defense and in defense of countless others with whom I identify or who are like me. I want to write because reality fills me with a sense of alienation. Silence only increases my alienation while confession opens me up so that I may head out toward the others or they may come to me themselves. (Ashour 1993, 170)

This is shown in the way Ashour recounts her experience with the African-American and Puerto-Rican communities in UMASS, for instance, where she expresses her personal reflections on the histories of these ‘marginalized’ groups and their shared activism on campus, creating what Lionnet calls a “métissage” (1989, 4) (or braiding) of cultural forms. Such strategy allows transformation of the genre and changes “relations of power in society” (Moore-Gilbert 2009, 70). Radwa explains her fascination with “reading history and literature voraciously,” which allowed her to “[enter] emotionally challenging fields of knowledge:
reliving the suffering of the African content whose wounds have bled for hundreds of years” (Ashour 2018, 18).

Moreover, the concept of ‘Memory’ permeates the text, both as a theme and a well-established technique. Max Saunders offers insight on using memory as a technique in life-writing: “one thing that life-writing shows is that while we may think of memory as somehow prior to auto/biography, or literature, or any form of textuality, our memories are always already textualized. They are by definition “after the event,” but also, as representations or mediations or narrativizations of the event, they have always begun to turn the event into something else” (2008, 323). Misch also introduces a further point, asserting the ‘fictionalized’ nature of using memory as a life-writing technique, where “memory [is] viewed as a mode of creation, even invention, rather than as something which offers unproblematic access to past ‘realities’” (1973, 11). This agrees with V.S. Naipaul, who saw memory as “essentially a creative act” (qtd in Moore-Gilbert 2009, 75).

Memory, as a technique, is a tool used to mediate Ashour’s attempts to create a narrative that combines (re)historicization of personal and public historical experiences with an autobiographical dimension. For one, Radwa ‘remembers’ historical events, both personal and public in order to move from being a mere spectator, into an active critiquing agent of history. Readers of the text will gain her insight on such interjections and reflections, making her not only an autobiographer of her own story, or a creator of an autofictional narrative, but also a passionate historiographer. Ashour muses on this very same idea in “My Experience with Writing”: “I realise now that history, in the sense of the recording of a historical reality, was always something that engrossed me” she says (1993, 174).

Ashour creates an intricate weave, or more of a pattern to writing The Journey that infuses an interplay between memory, history and self-referentiality all together. She describes normal, day-to-day, ordinary details of her life in Amherst, and portrays a very detailed picture of the city and campus, using factual details of street names, buildings (like Prince House, where her dorm room resides), or her newly established “relationship with the little mailbox with my room number -224- on it on the ground floor of Prince House” (2018, 12). She then shares and reinterprets -mostly in a cynical tone - significant moments and events in history that she remembers and believes are disregarded or recounted by the voice and eye of the dominant hegemonic powers. She, for instance, recounts her trip to Boston with her friends, and how she was enraged while walking on the Freedom Trail, where they were telling her about the
Boston Massacre in 1770. She points out that learning about the Boston Massacre immediately activated the remembrance of the Chilean National Stadium in Santiago where thousands were killed, or the Six-Day War massacres in June 1970 (2018, 66), which she saw as more or less indirectly caused or directly executed by the United States. She also offers her blatant critique of how each of these massacres would not be recognized for their gruesomeness, where there will be no “representatives” (2018, 67) to visit the massacre site or acknowledge their crimes. This is precisely what Moore-Gilbert mentioned when surveying the work of Feminist Autobiography critics that saw how women Autobiographers “second […] the objectives and methods of their historian colleagues, proposing that women’s life-writing should be considered not just as legitimate historical evidence but also as a form of (counter-) History” (2009, 78).

Although Radwa is extremely passionate about history, she is selective about which history to bond with. She mentions that as a school-girl, the American Revolution didn’t “speak to [her] at all” (Ashour 2018, 66). History as she comprehends it is ‘contrived,’ and built on massacres she feels strongly about, and therefore does not count as one worthy of celebration. Radwa does the exact opposite: she attacks, undermines, or ignores it at most. So, in this sense, she does not just play as an active agent in celebrating Third World solidarities, but brings the marginalized history to the center and pushes the dominant historical narrative to the peripheries, in a total reversal of power and agency. This complicated process is facilitated by the overlapping and interconnectedness of genres in the text. Radwa beautifully exemplifies this strong sense of defense of the marginalized history of everything that is non-Western in the text, when she contemplates the vibrant nature of African-American gatherings. “Why are Afro-American gatherings characterized by such vibrancy, as if people are carrying baskets in which to collect the fruits of the endurance, joy, and sorrow that they reaped over the harvest of a lifetime?” she asks (2018, 82). This process of deliberate ‘historicization’ consequently turns the text into a source of cultural memory.

According to Moore-Gilbert, unlike male life-writers, “the subjectivity in women’s life-writing is primarily relational rather than monadic, [creating] relational or collective identities” (2009, 18). This, in turn, forms a relationship between Ashour the individual and her “representative identity” (2009, 22) as a rebellious woman archetype, and between the author and the ‘colonizer’ (in a Fanonian essence). In the text, Radwa has “the imperative […] to identify with a collective destiny” (2018, 73). He also argues that “postcolonial subjectivity is
characteristically constructed between historical and collective historical experience” (2018, 82), which is precisely the case in *The Journey*. This is demonstrated in her usage of the pronoun “we,” every time she talks about the shared destiny and solidarity of Arabs, Africans, Latin-Americans and African-Americans, for example. In the beginning of the text, Radwa was attending meetings of the Committee she and her Arab friends formed right after war broke out between Egypt and Israel in 1973, as part of her activism for the Third World Students. She describes the setting of how “we Arab students were spread throughout the room and participated in conversations … We were seven Arab students” (2018, 22). Sharing a common goal, Radwa was proud that “we made our position clear in our manifesto and in a number of letters to the editor. We focused on our opposition to Israel” (2018, 23). Her subjectivity, then, was closely related to a bigger entity, where she felt she represented and was part of a collective identity and a shared destiny that calls for solidarity and unity.

This plural tone increases as the narrative continues, as she also identifies herself in relation to Afro-Americans who shared together the same African ancestry with her. Radwa feels familiarity and belonging amongst her African-American friends, partly because “we were able to form this immediate close connection because of how deeply they felt they were Africans who had been deracinated and still somehow belong to Egypt. Thus, I was not a stranger, but another Egyptian among them” (2018, 34). Ashour, through Radwa, takes it further and explores her identity in relation to those who share the state of ‘exile’ with her. In one of the parties she attended on campus, she couldn’t help but wonder “why in exile do we clutch onto our roots like this and attend every gathering affirming our identities? Is it fear or nostalgia? Or is it a pride in our tales of adversity?” (2018, 82). These contemplative questions compel us to reflect on the protagonist/author/narrator voice, where the demarcation between the voice of Radwa (the protagonist) and Ashour (the author/narrator) is not always distinct. This is an instance where the three of them merge into one blurred, collective voice.

Radwa further explores ‘relational’ identity when she attended a lecture by a leader from an Indigenous People community. She expresses how mesmerized she was with his recounts of the struggle to gain equal civil rights, his acts of ‘resistance,’ and she felt that “he brought a real place out of a fake cinematic context and gave it a place within History. I learned from it and became a part of it.” She also “mourned the dead” and “glorified life” with Chilean men playing Andean flutes on the stage (Ashour 2018, 90). Later, when she attends a concert as a finale for Liberation Week ‘activities, where she was actively
organizing demonstrations and talks advocating for the Palestinian cause, she expressed her awe at how people from different ‘Third World’ nations all came together in solidarity for Palestine. She describes the vibrant atmosphere around the room and contemplates the reason behind it:

Was our excitement that night a result of the success of the week we had organized? Or was it because the band and their songs were so good? Or was it that in watching the news every day we’d started to realize that this era was ending in our favor, even though we weren’t expecting it to? […] But as for us coming from the rest of the world, the brothers and sisters whipped by the stinging lash of imperialism’s whip, the news of this liberation and the raising of the revolutionary flag in Saigon was not merely the joyful media story we had been hoping for. It was also something that we related to, something at the very heart of our own stories, histories, and futures. (2018, 95; my emphasis)

Radwa, then, does not only ‘relate’ to others because of their shared struggle, but she has a ‘relational’ identity with history itself. It is an integral part of her subjectivity and existence, and in return, she lives, relives, celebrates it, and even claims the right to be equally involved in it, as she “[felt] like crying every time she sees the minarets and cornices of Al-Azhar because she thinks she is ‘denied its history’” (2018, 49). Radwa’s ‘relationality’ to history, then, is strongly tied to her personal narrative and unique recounting of events while on her journey, which are all emphasized through her use of a ‘fictionalized’ form of writing.

**Travel-Writing as a Form of Life-Writing**

Travel, as both theme and genre, has been widely and intensively used in writing about oneself in a narrative of what the *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms* calls “exploration and adventure” (1999, 937). The online encyclopedia.com platform also refers to travel-writing as a practice that “has always been as much about the exploration of the writer’s self as it has been about the places or peoples visited” (2020). Reflecting on the earlier definition of life-writing stated by Smith and Watson in the introduction section, travel-writing then, could be a valid form of life-writing, since it is consumed with taking the ‘life’ of its author/narrator/protagonist (or all of them) as its subject, and situating it in a context of spatial and personal exploration.
The tradition of travel-writing has widely been attributed to, and practiced by European male travelers, but Arab travel-writing can be traced back as far as the ninth century. European tradition of writing travelogues started being visible with medieval and Renaissance travel that explored European expansion to other parts of the world and was more consolidated during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth century as Europe was turning into an imperial, colonial entity. Women travelers from the ‘West’ have also taken the liberty of frequently writing about their journeys and adventures in the ‘exotic’ orient. In the book *Women Travelers on the Nile: An Anthology of Travel Writing through the Centuries*, for example, Deborah Manley (2016) inspects the experience of three middle-class Englishwomen, Florence Nightingale, Amelia Edwards and Harriet Martineau, who traveled to Egypt, in the nineteenth century, and wrote their accounts and impressions as they traveled from one village to the other. Manley highlights how the three women adopted an individualistic approach to travel and writing about it, moving away from the usual post-imperial, colonial agenda at that time. Travel-writing scholar, Sahar Abdel-Hakim, also writes about Sophia Poole’s book *The Englishwoman in Egypt*, which presented Poole’s involvement in Egyptian life and ways, and problematizes the reception of her work back in England when it was published. Abdel-Hakim highlights such problematic of “constructing the female self as a one coherent self that verges on the heroic, thereby following in the footsteps of patriarchal definition and practice. Such readings also tend to applaud imperial perceptions and colonial collaboration rather than acknowledge the rights of the topic of the text along with those of its writer” (2002, 108).

What is worth mentioning here is that there is scarcely the same amount of literary production, reception, and criticism, for that matter, from Arab women ‘exploring’ the West, let alone expressing their views on it. This is where Ashour’s narrative is important: it fills an important gap in the canon of both Life and Travel writing produced by women. In that sense, it is important to mention critic Joyce Kelley’s discussion about the differences in structure and themes between how men and women write a text with travel as one of its themes, especially around the nineteenth century, having noted that unlike men, “women concerned themselves with a smaller mapping of space; often their quests were less about opening new territories for their country and more about opening new spaces for themselves and their readers at home” (2005, 357-358). This is essential to highlight due to its relevance to my argument later that Ashour was a pioneer in, first, writing a travel text as an Arab woman academic traveling to America due to the obvious absence of literary production on that
front by women who hold as many layers of ‘disenfranchisement’ if one may call it so, and second, in subverting and re-inscribing the pre-existing discourse and structure of travel texts written by Western women traveling to the ‘Orient’. Moore-Gilbert asserts that postcolonial life-writers “use travel-writing as a counter-discourse, in a way which exceeds the ambitions of their western counterparts,” on the grounds that the genre provides room for “auto-ethnographical challenges to western representations of the non-West and for an ethnography to the West itself” (2009, xxii–xxiii). The core essence of Ashour’s text is her brilliant infusion of “historiography, fiction and travel-writing,” which, according to Moore-Gilbert, are originally all western forms of writing that “are now being used to ‘defend’ the non-West” (2009, xxiii) In my opinion, they are constitutive of what Autofiction as a form of writing has to offer, or encompass for that matter.

The process of construction of subjectivity in autobiographical and life-writing texts, narrating the self and establishing, or coming to terms with identity, have all been explored and expressed in travel-writing. Ashour’s narrative interrogates what Moore-Gilbert calls the “generic convention [that established] a stable, complete and ‘sovereign’ Self,” by creating a “hybrid text” (2009, 88) that disrupts and reaffirms conventions of genres and demarcates the boundaries of autobiography and life-writing, through offering a comprehensive perspective from Ashour’s (dis)location in America. Furthermore, it is also argued that postcolonial life-writing “engages to a very significant degree with both travel and its effect on the constitution of subjectivity, not least because of the substantial psychic and affective implications of (dis)location” (2009, 83). Therefore, the text was successful in dealing with pre-conceived cultural baggage and subjectivity affirmation against everything the United States symbolizes: colonialism, hegemony, and domination which seemed to gradually unload as she arrives and familiarizes herself with Amherst and the university campus.

As soon as she settles in, she begins recounting her ‘story’ that includes both personal, and historical details to Michael, the young Head of Department, “about Abdel Nasser, the Six-Day War, [her] family disowning [her] for [her] marriage to someone they didn’t approve of, the student protests, and the amazing love poem that Shaykh Imam sang about Alexandria” (Ashour 2018, 9). She also explains her reasons for studying Afro-American Literature “because of [her] interest in the relationship between literature and the reality of people’s struggles” (2018, 6), expressing the importance of carrying the burden of being relevant to the present. “I also said that I taught in an English literature
department, but didn’t want to become someone so embroiled in their research that I spend my whole life studying things which are not at the heart of the urgent issues that matter to me – the most pressing causes of our times,” she adds (2018, 6). Travel-writing, then, helps in elucidating Ashour’s subjectivity as “relational” to others, as previously discussed in the last section, and thus engaging with, not only issues of gender, but also of race, political solidarity, challenging post-imperialist ramifications on marginalized and disenfranchised groups in her sphere, and “break[ing] the private/public dichotomy” in Nawar Al-Hassan Golley’s terms (2003, xii).

Radwa starts her ‘journey’ in America by affirming her subjectivity as a woman who is not “besotted with the bright lights of Imperialism” (Ashour 2018, 2) unlike other past scholars, like Shaykh Rifa’a Tahtawi, who traveled to learn in foreign European countries. So, we know from the very beginning that she would not embark on a journey of identity formation (or reformation). Instead, she realizes the cultural and political sensitivities of her place as an Arab woman travelling alone on a three-year learning journey in a place where she would always be perceived as an ‘Other.’ The protagonist, nevertheless, is ‘certain’ that she carries the memory and experience of Tahtawi within her consciousness. She compares herself to him, as someone who was out to seek knowledge, in a land “far-far away from us, the furthest from consideration” (2018, 2), but then contrasts her situation with him and his generation. “But I was unlike him, too. I was leaving neither as a neutral person who doesn’t know what she is faced with, nor like the generation of researchers who followed him” (2018, 2). Hartman contends that Ashour

self-consciously invokes not only Tahtawi himself, but the generations of Egyptian and Arab men who traveled to the West, in search of knowledge and education to improve not only their individual lots in life, but with the express purpose of helping to modernize and improve Egypt and the Arab world. As ‘Ashur herself has stated, her committed stance as a Third World woman and intellectual impelled her not only to write a testimony in that same tradition, but to challenge and rewrite that very tradition. (2005, 289)

So, in fact, Ashour assumes a sophisticated intellectual and political stance when embarking on the trip and states that she will not fall prey to the bright lights, as her male predecessors did. Instead, she challenges all the existing mental and physical obstacles of travel, and ascribes to herself the mission of proving that
as a woman of Middle Eastern origin, she is equally qualified to (re)write the past and the present as she sees it.

It was also her involvement and shared solidarity with the African-American and Puerto-Rican communities on UMASS campus that dissipated the challenging emotional and ideological implications of the physical, as well as the metaphorical ‘journey’ on Radwa, shown in her recurrent reiteration, “what am I doing here?” (Ashour 2018, 5-9), “what compelled me to travel abroad?” (2018, 3) which is stimulating to think about, since it would be apparent that she had a ‘choice’ in going abroad to study. However, the answer to that repeated question is a few chapters later:

I am in a permanent state of motion. As a child I had an overflowing, consistently powerful life force and was always on the move. As an adolescent, I kept moving for fear of my developing body and my impending confinement to the home as a woman. As an adult I moved so much so that I could remain equal to men my age. I kept moving so I could learn, I kept moving so I could be free, I kept moving so my family wouldn't envelop me in their love and regulations. I stayed in motion so that society wouldn't force me into the inferior compartments it confines women to, and eventually all this movement became second nature. This was how it had been since I arrived in America. I found myself still constantly moving in order to ward off the feeling of being a stranger and to fulfill the many academic requirements that would allow me to finish my degree quickly so I could go back to Egypt. I attended my assigned courses. I read, wrote, discussed, explained, and passed my time well-always on the move. (2018, 25)

So, she had a multi-layered baggage she needed to unload, challenging the conformity of her familial influence, challenging all the existing barriers of gender, and race as an Arab woman, and taking ‘the journey.’ This emotional burden that she kept carrying around long after she arrived at Amherst, Massachusetts was a driving force all through the text to keep “wrestling” (2018, 6), rendering her husband’s letters as a “homeland” for her when “[she] was away from home. They made [her] feel that [she] was no longer lost in outer space, a place whose rules and customs [she] didn’t know” (2018, 18).

Towards the end of Radwa’s ‘journey’ (in its physical and metaphorical sense), we can already see that she transcends the feelings of estrangement and
is more comfortable to exercise her agency. At times, she would describe or visualize her surroundings in ambivalence, at other times, she finds herself in need to act in a confrontational or an oppositional way or both. For instance, when her husband visits, she decides to take him to “see America” (2018, 103), but she meant ‘see’ it through her eyes and perspective. She took a trip with Mourid to New York, in an interesting subversion of roles, since she’s the one showing him around and instilling her experience, which is believed to be an explicit assertion of her ownership and subjectivity. Upon visiting New York, Radwa has no problem expressing her sharp, blunt observations on the place and what it represents to her. She ponders on the idea that “New York chooses its deep-seated whiteness and leaves Harlem to the Blacks” (2018, 109). She avoids seeing the Statue of Liberty, and visits Harlem instead, wandering around and showing her husband the streets where minorities that include Puerto-Ricans, Indians and other nationalities from Latin America reside. The following day they see Picasso’s Guernica at the Museum of Modern Art, and on the last day of Mourid’s trip, they attend a Puerto Rican “day parade” (2018, 119).

At the end of their visit, in the Puerto Rican street parade, Radwa jokingly asks her husband: “Did you really come to New York and leave without visiting the Statue of Liberty, or should we buy a little statue and send your friends a postcard with a picture of it?” to which he understands her sarcastic comment and replies, “let’s ask a family for a Puerto-Rican flag!” (2018, 121). The Statue of Liberty is a deliberately diminished emblem, through which Radwa subverts the symbols of the widely accepted versions of American ‘national history,’ as she feels more at home defining herself and her experience with the ‘history’ of African Americans and other disenfranchised minorities, once more reinforcing the “relational” bond she had established with these groups. Paul Smethurst also notes that “all travel writing is to some extent a heroic exercise to bring textual order to bear on the experience of heterotopia produced by travel” (Kuehn and Smethurst 2009, 7). Thus, Ashour consciously creates a sense of textual order through understanding The Journey as a travel text, to render the American ‘other’ unambiguous, in contrast to how Radwa has perceived it, in the beginning of her journey.

**Conclusion**

Ashour’s ‘journey’ is physical, critical, and intellectual. By taking the risk of going to America, she explores herself and the new world she had gone to, through experimenting the physical, mental, emotional, critical and intellectual parameters and limits she could reach. In deciding to embark on writing this text,
she has consciously taken on the challenge of consolidating her place as a distinguished, masterful writer that expresses extremely sensitive and complicated notions. Ashour’s processes of historicization, interpretation and reflection are a way to ‘fill the gaps’ on the levels of her personal narrative, of public history, and of the Autobiography genre itself, one that is infused with many autofictional elements. Moreover, dealing with The Journey as a Travel text serves as a tapestry wide enough to encompass the rich, multi-layered narrative that she created. Travel, both as motif and genre, accentuates Ashour’s experience as a woman traveling to the West, shattering the layers of ‘Othering’ and challenging the long-existing tradition of travel-writing. She fills in the gaps of lack of understanding of the provided historical contexts from the perspective of not just an Arab academic, but a woman academic. She also fills the gap of the dilemma of delineation of boundaries of genre, and presents a new model that enriches and complicates the debate about generic definitions and theorization.

Memory and the act of ‘remembering’ are extremely pervasive in the text. She takes the massacres, the war, and other interventions she inserted in the text very, very personally. That aspect of historicization in the life narrative has a personal aspect that cannot be avoided or go unnoticed. And that is where the autobiographical (and autofictional) element jumps in – it is not just telling the story of getting her PhD, but it is the story of how she perceives all the history that she has learned about or witnessed and how it has shaped her. So, it becomes a mutual process: she shapes history, and history shapes her as well. The ‘her’ here is, I think, not entirely autobiographical. It is autofictional. In the text, Radwa offers an amalgamation of the author’s personal past, heritage, history and contemporary present (in the 1970s). Here is the intersection of the genres of autofiction, history, travel-writing and life-writing. So, in other words, the Radwa in the text is a persona that could have fictional aspects derived from her reflections on history, the past and the present, rather than just Radwa Ashour the writer and the teacher we know. In successfully ‘braiding’ together history, travel-writing and autofiction in the text, the three of them cease to be distinct genres, and turn into interwoven ‘techniques’ that affirm her agency in ‘telling the story’ on her own terms, thus, accentuating her authenticity, as well as liberating her from the stagnancy of conforming to existing writing conventions.
Endnotes

1 Studies of Radwa Ashour’s work have appeared in al-Mandeel al-ma’qoud (The Knotted Handkerchief), a bi-lingual critical volume edited by Faten Morsy and published in 2016. (See Kamal’s article on The Journey).
2 See Philip Lejeune’s “Autobiographical Contract” (1982)
3 There is a distinctive difference between the voices of the narrator, protagonist, and author that should be highlighted in this work. This is why I will be using ‘Radwa’ to refer to the protagonist, and ‘Ashour’ to the author herself, and will refer to the narrator as such if I need to.

Works Cited


Growing numbers of writers are ‘on the move’ and travel outside their native cultures and homelands. Globalization, colonization, and mobility caused multicultural encounters among subjects, raising issues related to border crossings. While moving across the globe and in between different cultures and nations, individuals find themselves more apt to embrace opportunities of freedom that mobility is able to grant them. Identities are continuously producing and reproducing different versions of themselves according to the shifting locations and multiple existences they embody. The postmodern identity is in a constant mode of becoming. This paper highlights the construction and malleability of the transnational self across borders through examining two novels, namely Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006 [2007]), and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* (2013 [2017]). These two novels are examined and read from a transnational perspective since concepts such as migration, mobility, and colonization are highlighted throughout. Since both novels deal with the concept of migration explicitly, this paper addresses how migration may affect or change the subject, how characters may or may not develop a malleable and hybridized identity, and how living in-between cultures affects the characters’ position and vision. Transnational scholars and theorists explain that identity is fluid rather than fixed, and transnationalism believes that individuals exist beyond the nation-state. Transnational mobility highlights cross-border connections and goes against essentialist views, promoting and emphasizing difference. Since identities are in constant movement and are considered fluid and malleable, identities progress and transform in relation to

---

* Independent researcher. This paper is derived from her Ph.D. thesis in-progress, entitled “The Malleability of the Gendered Self across Borders: A Comparative Study of Assia Djebar, Kiran Desai, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie” (Cairo University), supervised by Prof. Shereen Abouelnaga.  
*Cairo Studies in English* 2020(2): https://cse.journals.ekb.eg/
the places they travel to. Transnationalism highlights cross-border connections and explains how people and cultures are connected across borders.

In *The Grammar of Identity: Transnational Fiction and the Nature of the Boundary*, Stephen Clingman explains that “transnational fiction is written by, and directed towards, migrant and multi-lingual communities who exist in multiple and in-between spaces. It is, in essence, a migrant and migrating literature” (2012, 8). From a fictional as well as a theoretical point of view, the present interest in mobility is a result of the increasing relevance of postcolonial discourses and the continuous process of globalization, which has resulted in a re-conceptualization of identity and location. Arianna Dagnino explains,

> we have entered an age of “global uncertainty” and “liquid times” in which fixed points of reference vanish, boundaries fade, cultural edges blur and (im)migration (imposed or chosen), movement, and voluntary or involuntary displacement become a common trait for growing numbers of people [...] people throughout all layers of society are on the move across the planet and experience the effects of dislocation. (2013, n. pag.)

Moreover, Dagnino also explains that “mobility in all its variants – international, professional and leisure travel, diasporas, forced or voluntary (im)migrant labor, elite frequent flying – has become the trope of societies” (2013, n. pag.). Thus, mobility suggests a loosening of identity constraints and opens new dimensions in an individual’s identity when they cross borders.

In an increasingly multicultural world that is governed by transnational ideas, identities are shaped through mobility and travel, often resulting in the formation of a hybridized and hyphenated identity. Mobility allows subjects to defy an attempt to be merely defined by a certain geographic location or ideology, and movement in the selected texts provides a means to represent these malleable and hybrid identities. The characters in both novels encounter at least two cultures, and their mobility may or may not lead to the formation of a hybrid identity. In “Hybridity, Why It Still Matters,” Vanessa Guignery defines hybridity and explains that

> postcolonial theory adopted the idea of hybridity to designate the transcultural forms that resulted from linguistic, political or ethnic intermixing, and to challenge the existing hierarchies, polarities, binarisms, and symmetries (East/West, black/white,
The Transnational Self Across Borders

colonizer/colonized, majority/minority, self/other, interior/exterior). […] Hybridity stands in opposition to the myth of purity and racial and cultural authenticity, of fixed and essentialist identity, embraces blending, combining, syncretism and encourages the composite, the impure, the heterogeneous and the eclectic. (2011, 3)

Thus, hybridity basically presents itself as a discourse that challenges essentialist views and the idea of a dominant and fixed culture. Homi Bhabha, a principal theorist of hybridity, claims that the movement between nations causes individuals to end up in-between cultures, developing a hybrid identity within a ‘third space’. Bhabha explains that crossing a border puts an individual in “the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion” (1994, 1-2). In an interview conducted by Jonathan Rutherford, Bhabha explains that “all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity” and he goes on to clarify that

the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the “third space” which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom. (1990, 211)

It is apparent that hybrid identities may begin to surface due to colonization and the movement between cultures. Bhabha explains that the increasing occurrence of these hybrid identities places individuals in an in-between space where individuals are “neither the One […] nor the Other […] But something else besides which contests the terms and territories of both,” and this is what Bhabha means by the term third space (1994, 41). Thus, it can be concluded that hybridity leads to the creation of something new, a ‘third space’, where different cultures interlock and where different cultural identities are continually being formed, reformed, and are constantly in a state of becoming. Third space is a place where hybrid identifications are formed, where interchanges between different cultures evolve, and is a place where new qualities come to existence. Bhabha highlights how mobility and colonization cause identity to be placed within a liminal space or a third space rather than confined to one nation or one culture. He explains that the third space “opens up the possibility of a cultural
hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (1994, 5). Bhabha further explains that occupying a third space “gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation,” which highlights the fact that hybridity and third space go against essentialism (1990, 211).

Through Bhabha’s explanation, it is clear that cultures and identities are no longer pure or inherited from tradition. Instead, new ‘in-between’ and hybrid identities are being forged within a new space when two different cultures intertwine. Bhabha further explains, “these new in-between spaces provide a terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood […] that initiate new signs of identity and innovative sites for collaboration and contestation” (1994, 2). Moreover, Edward W. Soja defines third space as

a space of extraordinary openness, a place of critical exchange where the geographical imagination can be expanded to encompass a multiplicity of perspectives that have heretofore been considered by the epistemological referees to be incompatible, uncombinable. It is a space where issues of race, class, and gender can be addressed simultaneously without privileging one over the other. (2009, 50)

Thus, through Bhabha and Soja’s definitions and explanations, it is apparent that the third space is a place where new forms of identities develop and where the hybrid nature of multicultural interactions is achieved.

In Reconstructing Hybridity: Post-Colonial Studies in Transition, Joel Kuortti and Jopi Nyman explain how postcolonial subjects go through a process of recasting their fixed identity:

The liminal space between the cultures of the colonizer and the colonized, migrants and other (post)colonial subjects go through a process that recasts their fixed sense of identity. While this reconstruction of identity may be positive and empowering, its transgressive character and location in the liminal space of borders and boundaries also, as Bhabha writes, poses potential dangers as it generates a new, hybrid subjectivity. Thus, to enter the Third Space, while it shows the potentiality of constructing a non-fixed identity, generates a new sense of identity that may resemble the old ones but is not quite the same. (2007, 8)
Although occupying a third space may be positive and empowering, there are dangers and disadvantages that may occur in the process. Salman Rushdie also emphasizes how mobility causes the person to sometimes develop a double consciousness and he clarifies that mobility causes a person to learn the new ways of a community, [and] is forced to face the great questions of change and adaptation; but many migrants, faced with the sheer existential difficulty of making such changes, and also, often, with the sheer alienness and defensive hostility of the peoples amongst whom they find themselves, retreat from such questions behind the walls of the old culture they have brought along and left behind. (2003, 82)

Rushdie explains how mobility may affect the identity in different, perhaps negative ways, where they hurry and hide “behind the walls of old culture,” which results mainly from geographical and cultural dislocation (2003, 82). Rushdie explains that mobility may affect a person in a negative way when an individual is resistant to change and clings to their own culture instead of having an open mind to acquire new traits from a new culture. This resistance to change is seen through a character named Biju in The Inheritance of Loss.

In The Inheritance of Loss, Kiran Desai is concerned with the migration of characters from their South Asian homeland to England and the United States and is also concerned with the characters in India who are influenced by the British culture. Kiran Desai is an Indian author who left her homeland, India, at the age of fourteen, and lived in England and then moved permanently to the United States. The novel contains two interconnected narratives: the first is set in New York and explores the effect of globalization on migrant workers while the other is set in India and analyzes the effects of colonization on its characters. All the characters in Desai’s novel, whether in New York, England, or India, find themselves located between at least two cultures, and throughout the novel, we can see both the potentials and the pitfalls of the modern, hybrid, and malleable identity.

In The Inheritance of Loss, Kiran Desai is concerned with the concept of migration and with what it means to live in a post-colonial setting. Mobility is discerned in the novel’s interconnected stories of migration: the story of Jemubhati Patel, the judge or Jemu in short, who leaves India in 1939 to pursue a higher education at Cambridge, which Desai portrays in her novel through flashbacks, and the story of Biju, an Indian illegal immigrant in the United
States. These two narratives are linked to the story of the Nepali-Indian minority, who demand statehood in the town of Kalimpong in the mid 1980’s, and to Jemu’s granddaughter, an orphan named Sai. Desai represents the mobility of her characters through employing a fragmented structure in her novel, a structure that shifts between different times and spaces, using a gloomy tone in order to show that immigration is a difficult movement between home and the host land.

Both Jemu and Biju emigrate from their country of origin, India. However, due to the difference in social class and legal status, Biju and Jemu’s experiences in their host countries are very different. In “Identity and Migration: An Introduction,” La Barbera explains that “faced with an unknown universe of meanings, migrants feel lost, alone, and without reference points. As much as they strive to become integrated, migrants remain strangers. Moreover, migrants face distrust and hostility” (2015, 3). This can be clearly applied to both characters, Biju and Jemu. In The Inheritance of Loss, it can be argued that Jemu and Biju’s mobility and immigration have a limited transformative potential in their host countries since “[n]either the judge nor Biju achieved social or financial success abroad, and both created exaggerated, rigid identities for themselves- either pure English or Indian” (Speilman 2010, 88).

Biju, the son of Jemu’s cook, who immigrates to the United States to escape his poverty is an example of how mobility has an inadequate impact. Kiran Desai outlines themes of dislocation and yearning for home through the character of Biju. He is considered to be the perfect example of the character who hurries to hide “behind the walls of old culture” and who refuses to become a hybrid and to let go of his own heritage and origin (Rushdie 2003, 82). Biju is an illegal immigrant who is exploited in the kitchens of New York and finds it impossible to adjust to the American culture. Working in a restaurant in New York and serving meat goes against Biju’s principles and religion and this is clearly portrayed when he states, “Holy cow unholy cow. Job no Job. One should not give up one’s religion, the principles of one’s parents and their parents before them. No matter what” (Desai 2007, 135-36). It is clear that Biju experiences a fear of losing India and his identity throughout his stay in the United States, and so he decides to stand by his cultural and religious principles and finds another job in an Indian restaurant, Gandhi Café, owned by an Indian who goes by the name Harish-Harry.

In “Migration, Globalization, and Divided Identity in Kiran Desai’s The Inheritance of Loss,” Kondali explains that,
Biju’s sense of self and his cultural awareness are under pressure to westernize, which in turn triggers his struggle to resist. His awareness of himself becomes deeply shaken, driven by painful displacement not only from his homeland, family and culture, but from his previous understanding of his individual and collective belonging. (2018, 109)

It is apparent that Biju resists embracing a hybrid identity and does not want to adapt to the American culture in any way. During his stay in the United States, he only dreams of his homeland, and makes sure that he does not lose the Indian cultural values that are instilled within him. Dagnino argues that “being on the move is not enough if there is not the willingness, the curiosity, the disposition, the (cultural/material) means, the sensibility, and in general, an ‘expansive orientation’ to open oneself to the Other and participate in, be involved with the culture/s of the Other” (2013, n. pag.). Biju does not have the willingness nor the curiosity to open himself to the American culture and refuses to be involved in it in any way. When Biju decides to go back to India, the Nepali radicals rob him of everything on his way back home: his clothes, his wallet, his shoes, his belt, his jacket, his jeans, and his T-shirt (Desai 2007, 317). Biju returns to India “without his baggage, without his savings, worst of all, without his pride. Back from America with far less than he’d ever had,” which highlights how Biju’s mobility was in no way groundbreaking (317). Although Biju returns to India without his pride and with far less than he ever had, it is clear that he still feels very relieved to be back to his hometown:

Biju stood there in that dusty tepid soft sari night. Sweet drabness of home - he felt everything shifting and clicking into place around him, felt himself slowly shrink back to size, the enormous anxiety of being a foreigner ebbing – that unbearable arrogance and shame of the immigrant. No body paid attention to him here, and if they said anything at all, their words were easy, unconcerned. He looked about and for the first time in God knows how long, his vision unblurred and he found that he could see clearly. (300)

It is evident that when Biju returns to his hometown he feels calmer and a sense of relief dawns upon him. This proves that Biju is a rooted individual, and all along, he never accepted being a hybrid, only wanting the Indian culture to be infused within him.
In relation to hybridity, the dichotomy between ‘routes’ and ‘roots’ cannot be overlooked since it explores the complex relationship between the homonyms in the process of identity formation. Through mobility and migration, individuals are positioned at the transnational spaces of nations, and hybrid identities are reproduced as a product of several intertwined histories, cultures, and societies. This may either lead to discarding your own ‘roots,’ rejecting the ‘route’ one takes, or in some cases, may lead to the emergence of the hybrid self. Regardless of the outcome, identity still exists in a tension and mediation between ‘roots’ and ‘routes.’

In “Roots and Routes: Exploring the Relationship Between Place and Attachment and Mobility,” Per Gustafson explains that “roots has long been an important metaphor for place and attachment in Western society […] It is part of a metaphorical system linking people to place, identity to territory. In this context, roots signify emotional bonds with the physical environment but also contains notions of local community, shared culture, and so forth” (2001, 670). Gustafson clarifies the concept of ‘routes’ as well, and explains that “this concept points towards [people’s] mobility, their movements, encounters, exchanges, and mixtures” (2001, 670). Thus, ‘roots’ refers to how individuals identify themselves within their country of birth and refers to the authentic home and origin culture, whereas, ‘routes’ involves movement, mobility, immigration, and change. Moreover, the term ‘route’ recognizes the fluidity and flexibility of identity and how one’s identity changes over time, depending on what path an individual takes. Susan Friedman explains that “roots and routes are, in other words, two sides of the same coin: roots signifying identity based on stable cores and continuities; routes, suggesting identity based on travel, change, and disruption” (1998, 153). Since a rooted identity is rather essentialist, many theories such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, David Moore, and Susan Friedman celebrate hybridity and the concept of ‘route’ since they all believe that the formation of identity transcends national boundaries.

In “Routes,” David Moore explains that “we need to talk not about roots but about routes: trajectories, paths, interactions, links. This root itself is not a bad, false, or wrong story. It is rather a narrowly true narrative in the midst of a broader and more tangled truth, or richer story” (1994, 21). In The Post-Colonial Critic, Spivak states in an interview, “One is always on the run, and it seems I haven’t really had a home base- and this may have been good for me. I think it’s important for people not to feel rooted in one place” (1990, 37). Moreover, in Mappings, Friedman states:
Identity developed through routes involves an experience of leaving roots, of moving beyond the boundaries of “home” (however that is defined or problematized). A geopolitical identity rooted in “home” insists upon sameness within the home circle; one formed through leaving home base involves interaction with others, which fosters the formation of hybridic combinations. (1998, 154)

Friedman further emphasizes that “narratives about identity and the identity of narrative itself involve an underlying dialogic negotiation between the assertion of difference (roots) and the acceptance of hybridity produced through travel in time and space (routes)” (1998, 11). The interplay between ‘roots’ and ‘routes’ in the two novels is very evident and can be seen through the characters since some of them embrace their hybridity and go on different routes, while others resist change and only feel rooted in one location. As seen through Biju’s character, he is considered to be rooted in one location, India, and resists the ‘route’ he took to the United States. Mobility and border crossing affect characters in very different ways; however, it is possible to argue that it has stark effects on their identity formation. Most of the characters in the novels suffer from an identity crisis caused by mobility, colonization, and displacement; hence the malleability of the self is an essential tenet of the ‘becoming’ process.

Jemu is considered to be an impoverished student in England, who eventually returns to India, and in the process, transforms into an Anglicized individual who discards his family and native culture, choosing instead a life based on a fixated quest for insincere colonial ideals. Jemu leaves his fourteen year old wife, Nimi, and his ancestral home Piphit and “from there he had journeyed to the Bombay dock and then sailed to Liverpool, and from Liverpool he had gone to Cambridge” to continue his studies (Desai 2007, 35). In Cambridge, Jemu’s days were filled with racism and loneliness where “girls held their noses and giggled, ‘Phew, he stinks of curry!’” (39). Moreover, during his stay in England, Jemu stopped talking in the first person, and the narrator states, “He had learned to take refuge in the third person and to keep everyone at bay, to keep even himself away from himself” (111). This led Jemu to become a stranger to himself where he eventually “found his own skin odd-colored, his accent peculiar […] He began to wash obsessively, concerned he would be accused of smelling, and each morning he scrubbed off the thick milky scent of sleep, the barnyard smell that wreathed him when he woke” (40). During his stay in England, Jemu develops a craze for the Western culture, and Kondali explains that “once away from India, [Jemu] undergoes an educational and cultural transformation in England
that has a profound impact on his identity: he confines himself to his room, lets his landlady call him James, and becomes embarrassed by his unpronounceable name, his pronunciation of English, and the color and smell of his skin” (2018, 110). Unlike Biju, Jemu tries to run away from his roots.

When Jemu returns to his homeland, India, it is apparent that he has become negatively obsessed with his Indian identity, which is evident as he continually tries to wash himself over and over again, and begins using white powder to hide his Indian features. Desai explains that Jemu’s “face seemed distanced by what looked like white powder over dark skin,” revealing his insecurities and the way he wants to get rid of his Indian identity (2007, 33). Moreover, Jemu clings to his English identity when he returns to India since he believes that clinging to Western ideals will elevate him above others in the community. In the novel, the narrator explains that Jemu “could live here, in this shell, in this skull, with the solace of being a foreigner in his own country” because “English was better than Hindi” (29-30). Jemu is obsessed with Western values, manners, and language and Desai clearly portrays that in her novel when she explains that “[Jemu] envied the English. He loathed Indians. He worked at being English with the passion of hatred and for what he would become, he would be despised by absolutely everyone, English and Indians, both” (119). Jemu was a lost individual who wanted to mimic the West and tried his utmost best to detach himself from his own origin, culture, and roots.

Thus, La Barbera explains that a migrant’s position is “in between, at the borderland, in transit. The process that begins when one leaves his/her country never ends, and it generates an unfinished condition of not yet belonging ‘here’ but no longer ‘there,’” which is clearly applicable to Jemu’s case (2015, 3). The reason why Jemu’s immigration may be viewed in a negative manner is because he is depicted in the novel as an individual who continually tries to separate himself from his roots and desperately attempts to run away from his Indian heritage. Oana Sabo argues that “the tension between local and global cultures is further explored through the depiction of an anachronistic Anglophile elite. On the higher end of the hierarchal scale is the misanthropic Judge Patel, whose admiration for the English […] renders him ‘a foreigner in his own country’” (2012, 383). Moreover, “The judge’s anglophilia marks him as a particular kind of postcolonial subject: a self-hating Indian, a would-be Englishman, a foreigner to everyone including himself” (Speilman 2010, 77). Jemu suppresses his Indian identity and at the same time cannot be considered English; thus he refuses to embrace his hybridity and rather focuses on impersonating merely the English identity. Speilman then compares both Biju and Jemu and states, “whereas the
judge eschews what he has learned in India when he leaves and constructs solid knowledge from firsthand experiences abroad, Biju rejects firsthand experience and clings to his established beliefs,” emphasizing the difference between both characters (2010, 78). It is clear that neither Biju nor Jemu’s mobility are transformative in any manner since Jemu becomes an Anglicized Indian who develops a craze for the West, whereas Biju resists the American culture, and refuses to adapt to it, and so they both become resistant to the idea of developing a hybrid self.

Jemu and Biju’s mobility is depicted in a negative manner since their mobility leads them to develop a fixed identity. Jemu comes back to his country with a negative attitude, trying to escape his own Indian heritage and attempting to mimic the West instead, whereas, Biju fails to adapt to the American culture, develops a rigid identity, and returns to India “with far less than he’d ever had” (2007, 317). Jemu, rejects his Indian heritage, culture, and roots and only allows the English culture to be infused within him. He is unable to accept the presence of his native culture and roots and, at the same time, cannot be considered to be purely English; thus, he is displaced from both cultures and becomes a stranger to everyone. Biju, unlike Jemu, rejects another culture taking over, and dreams and wishes to go back to his country of origin. Biju does not believe in adopting a new identity and wants to “hold on to a one-dimensional and immutable Indian identity because it safeguards him from ‘contradictions’” (Winden 2015, 52). Biju’s response to hybridity suggests that he prefers to stay loyal to his own culture, to his own roots; thus, one can infer that both Biju and Jemu reject hybridity and transnationalism and instead adopt a singular culture, but in Biju’s case, he chooses only the Indian culture to be infused within him, whereas Jemu chooses the English culture.

In Globalization and the Postcolonial World, Hoogvelt argues that cultural hybridity is “celebrated and privileged as a kind of superior cultural intelligence owing to the advantage of in-betweenness, the straddling of two cultures and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference” (2001, 158). The reason why many theorists celebrate the concept of hybridity is because it can be seen as an antidote to essentialism and because it empowers individuals since subjects undergo a process that recasts their identity. It is also explained that “as a product of belonging to multiple affiliations, the hybridization of being at the borderlands poses serious challenges to the existing hegemonic culture of society,” which shows how hybridity helps in dismantling essentialism and hegemony (La Barbera 2015, 5). Similarly, Susan Friedman explains that “hybridity is transgressive, a creative force that disrupts, denaturalizes, and potentially
dismantles hegemonic cultural formations” (2002, 8). Thus, the possibility of
difference that hybridity proposes involves multicultural interactions where
concepts like identity and space are defined as malleable rather than static and
fixed. However, Samir Dayal criticizes the concept of hybridity and states that
his attempt and goal “is to conceive doubleness negatively, to explode the
positive and equilibristic constructions of diaspora around the desire of
belonging ideally to two or more places or cultures. That ‘doubleness’ is often
laced with nostalgia, filial piety, and credulity. It is hardly a space within which
a salutary rhetoric of suspicion can flourish” (1996, 47). Dayal further explains
that “its negative value is that it denies the subject’s sovereignty and stresses the
performativity of the subject” (48). Thus, it is clear that there are many critics
who celebrate hybridity and others who criticize the concept itself claiming that
it denies the subject’s autonomy.

An example of a hybrid identity in _The Inheritance of Loss_ would be Biju’s
colleague and friend, Saeed Saeed, a minor character in the novel. Saeed
executes multiple identities that instigate from both his cultural roots and
mindful choices. Saeed is a Muslim from Zanzibar who lives in the United
States, and refuses to eat pork due to his religious affiliations. He tells Biju, “First
I am a Muslim, then I am Zanibari, then I will BE American” (Desai 2007, 136).
It is evident that Saeed acknowledges his multiple identities and has no problems
with them. Throughout the novel, we do not see Saeed as someone who clings
to his origin nor does he cling to the culture of his host country; he is a mixture
of all cultures and a proper hybrid. Speilman argues that “Saeed does not strive
after solid knowledge the way Biju does, nor does he resist change. His success
derives primarily from his ability to adapt to the cultural context in which he
finds himself” (2010, 79-80). Saeed is considered to be a flexible and malleable
character who adapts to the American culture, and this is highlighted when the
narrator states, “he relished the whole game, the way the country flexed his wits
and rewarded him; he charmed it, cajoled it, cheated it, felt great tenderness and
loyalty toward it” (Desai 2007, 79). Also, Saeed reads a self-help book and tells
Biju, “Now you are here, you are not back home. Anything you want, you try
and you can do” (190). Saeed does not allow anything to stop him from being
who he wants to become and develops a malleable identity.

While Biju finds love for his Indian culture in the United States of America,
and Jemu finds love for the English culture in England, Sai, Jemu’s
granddaughter, seems to accept her hybridity. Sai seems to be more aware of her
Western traits and upbringing in India since she was brought up by English nuns.
Sai’s parents both die and she grows up as a Westernized Indian; however,
The Transnational Self Across Borders

despite that, Sai never becomes an anglophile and embraces both her Indian and English personas. When we first encounter Sai in the novel, she was “reading an article about a giant squid in an old National Geographic” (Desai 2007, 1). Although Sai is reading an English magazine in her home in India, she “does not strictly fall into a Western or Eastern Category” (Hooda 2014, 33). She may be labeled as a Westernized Indian; however, she does not choose to cling to one of the cultures like Jemu or Biju. When she falls in love with Gyan, her Nepali math tutor, she is provoked by his assertions that she is a servant of the West. Gyan tells Sai:

You are like slaves, that’s what you are, running after the West, embarrassing yourself. […] Can’t think for yourself. Copycat, copycat. Don’t you know these people you copy like a copycat, THEY DON’T WANT YOU!!!. (Desai 2007, 163-164)

To further prove his point, Gyan asks Sai, “Why do you celebrate Christmas? You’re Hindus and you don’t celebrate Id or Guru Nanak’s birthday or even Durga Puja or Dussehra or Tibetan New Year” (163). However, Sai does not back off and tells him in an assertive tone, “If I want to celebrate Christmas, I will, and if I don’t want to celebrate Diwali then I won’t. Nothing wrong with a bit of fun and Christmas is an Indian holiday as much as any other” (163). Sai embraces her hybridity, and this is very evident from the way she responds to Gyan’s criticism. She wants to celebrate Christmas whenever she wants to, and at the same time, she is never bothered by her Indian heritage. Speilman argues that:

Sai, however, responds to this westernizing very differently from the way that her grandfather had. She does not become an anglophile, despising Indian things and attempting to elevate herself by fashioning an exclusively western identity. She adopts an ambivalent mindset towards her potentially contradictory desires. She wants English but also Indian things. (2010, 83)

Sai embraces both her Indian and English sides equally even though English nuns raised her as a Westernized Indian.

Towards the end of the novel, Sai thinks “of all the National Geographics and books she had read. Of the judge’s journey, […] of Biju’s. Of the globe twirling on its axis. And she felt a glimmer of strength. Of resolve. She must leave”
Nada Ghazy

Desai 2007, 323). Sai realizes that she needs to move away from India, to explore herself in other locations, thus showing how Sai advocates movement and mobility and realizes that India is too small for her and that her life could be anchored in many locations. Hooda explains that “Sai’s identity, unlike other characters, is the least culturally conflicted, despite being so Westernized in her little Indian village. […] Unlike other characters in the novel, she does not differentiate between ideas of the East and West” (2014, 40). Sai, the grandchild of Jemu, exemplifies Bhabha’s idea of a cultural hybrid since she “can remain in the Indian private sphere while still embodying an Anglicized lifestyle, because she is the result of the East and the West. […] [Sai] is the cultural hybrid ‘that entertains difference.’ She represents postcolonial India as the result of combining the uncolonized with the colonized” (48). Sai does not see the difference between the East and the West because she is a descendant of both and decides to blur the two together as a hybrid, and enters the third space.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Americanah focuses on the concept of migration as well; however, the two protagonists in Americanah immigrate because they want to, not because of poverty as seen through Biju’s case in The Inheritance of Loss. In Americanah, the two protagonists, Ifemelu and Obinze, meet and fall in love as students in their native land, Nigeria. They both separate and immigrate, Obinze to Britain, and Ifemelu to the United States. The novel begins as Ifemelu in her thirties is preparing to return to Nigeria, and the novel unfolds in a series of flashbacks. Both Ifemelu and Obinze immigrate due to the “oppressive lethargy of choicelessness” in Nigeria (Adichie 2017, 276). When Obinze is around his friends, he feels alienated because his migration story is unusual and different from the collective and usual ones that are driven by poverty and war:

Alexa, and the other guests, and perhaps even Georgina, all understood the fleeing from war, the poverty that crushed human souls, but they would not understand the need to escape from the oppressive lethargy of choicelessness. They would not understand why people like him, who were raised well-fed and watered but mired in dissatisfaction, conditioned from birth to look towards somewhere else, eternally convinced that real lives happened in that somewhere else. […] None of them starving, or raped, or from burned villages, but merely hungry for choice and certainty. (276)
Thus, it can be deduced that in the case of Obinze and Ifemelu, their migration is not caused by the common reasons, but was due to their need to experience more options and choices elsewhere. Francis B. Nyamnjoh explains that Africans are not mobile unless they are provoked or forced to move due to natural disasters:

Africans are not expected to be mobile, even as mobility is celebrated. The impression is given that Africans are mobile only when things go wrong or others so desire that they would ordinarily stay grounded, were it not for rapid population growth, economic stagnation, poverty, unemployment, conflicts and ecological disasters. Nothing African moves unless provoked by forces beyond their control. (2013, 659)

However, Adichie depicts Africans who immigrate because they want to, because they are hungry for more choice, dismantling the stereotypical idea that Africans only migrate due to terrible conditions.

Throughout Adichie’s novel, we find that the protagonist, Ifemelu, does indeed belong to more than one culture, and loses her fixed identity in the process, finding herself at some point alienated due to the clash of cultures. Moreover, in relation to the concept of hybridity, Simon Gikandi explains the concept of Afropolitanism in the Foreword of the book Negotiating Afropolitanism:

Afropolitanism may sound awkward as a term, but there is no doubting that it has been promoted by the desire to think of African identities as both rooted in specific local geographies but also transcendental of them. To be Afropolitan is to be connected to knowable African communities, nations and traditions; but it is also to live a life across cultures, languages, and states. It is to embrace and celebrate a state of cultural hybridity – to be of Africa and of the other worlds at the same time. (2011, 9)

It can be stated that Ifemelu is an Afropolitan and a hybrid since she undergoes many changes in her identity and is situated between both the Eastern and Western cultures. We see Ifemelu as a native Nigerian, as an immigrant in the United States, and then she eventually transforms into a hybrid of both cultures. Ifemelu’s identity has been influenced by both the Nigerian and American
Nada Ghazy

cultures and the title of the novel also signifies the hybridization of Ifemelu who eventually becomes an ‘Americanah’ or in other words Americanized. Ifemelu is presented as a migrant whose identity constantly changes, thus showing how mobility leads to the malleability of the self.

As soon as Ifemelu arrived to the United States, “she began to practice an American accent” (Adichie 2017, 134). Ifemelu’s decision to practice the American accent depicts her linguistic hybridity and the malleability of her identity. Sackeyfio explains, “the act of speaking in a foreign voice marks the beginning of conscious doubling of [Ifemelu’s] identity” (217). Another example of adapting to the American culture is when Ifemelu straightens her hair to look more American. Ifemelu was conversing with one of her friends about finding a job in the United States and Ruth advises her to lose her braids by saying, “My only advice? Lose the braids and straighten your hair. Nobody says this kind of stuff but it matters. We want you to get that job” (202). Ifemelu decides to go to a hairdresser and relax her hair, and after doing so the hairdresser tells her, “Wow, girl, you’ve got the white-girl swing!” (203). After Ifemelu leaves the hairdresser she feels down, and “she did not recognize herself. She left the salon almost mournfully; while the hairdresser had flat-ironed the ends, the smell of burning, of something organic dying which should not have died, had made her feel a sense of loss” (203). Although Ifemelu likes her original braided hair, she learns that she has to straighten it because the American society does not think braided hair is beautiful, and she has to adapt to her host culture. At this point in the novel, Ifemelu tries to adapt to the American culture and is somehow lost between both the Nigerian and American cultures.

Ifemelu modifies her physical appearance, her actions, and her voice to incorporate herself into the American social ambiance. She is caught between cultures, and “to live between cultures or languages is one important way of coping with the disorientation of moral geographies at the end of modernity” (Gikandi 2011, 10). It is clear that Ifemelu’s manner of integrating herself into the American society and culture causes her to compromise and change who she really is. Although Ifemelu can be considered to be a hybrid, her sense of belonging towards Nigeria continually changes throughout the novel. In “Journey and Return: Visiting Unbelonging and Otherness in Adichie’s Americanah” Soheila Arabian explains:

Ifemelu does not reveal any sense of belonging toward her motherland and she even looks for a way to leave; thus when she receives a scholarship, she leaves her country with a hope to ‘prosper
in America’. But after displacement, the situation changes and she faces a different life in America. Discrimination and racial issues alienate her as a black which brings her a sense of unbelonging towards America; consequently, she returns to her African origin and reveals her sense of belonging toward Nigeria. (2015, 538)

Similar to Biju’s case in *The Inheritance of Loss*, Ifemelu eventually longs for her homeland and feels she belongs to Nigeria after facing discrimination in the United States. After living in the United States for so long, “Nigeria became where [Ifemelu] was supposed to be, the only place she could sink her roots in without the constant urge to tug them out and shake off the soil” (Adichie 2017, 6). The noted difference between them is that Biju does not let the American culture penetrate him at all and that Ifemelu does adapt to the American lifestyle during her stay in the United States and develops a malleable and hybridized identity.

Towards the end of the novel, Ifemelu slowly makes a conscious decision to stick to her roots and origins and decides to leave her hair as is instead of straightening it. Ifemelu starts braiding her hair again and “on an unremarkable day of early spring … she looked in a mirror, sank her fingers into her hair, dense and spongy and glorious, and could not imagine it any other way. That simply, she fell in love with her hair” (167). Moreover, she also “decided to stop faking an American accent on a sunlit day in July” (173) because “her fleeting victory had left in its wake a vast, echoing space, because she has taken on, for too long, a pitch of voice and a way of being that was not hers (176). This is the turning point in the novel since Ifemelu is beginning to reclaim her Nigerian identity and roots. Her decision to drop the American accent and maintain her natural hair is indeed an active comeback and cultural declaration of her Nigerian heritage. Although Ifemelu decides to hold on to her origin, leave her natural hair, and drop her American accent, she is still considered a hybrid character, and this is highlighted when she returns to Nigeria.

Due to Ifemelu’s hybrid nature and the interweaving between the American and Nigerian cultures, when she returns to Nigeria, people claim that she has become Americanized. When Ifemelu arrives to Lagos in Nigeria, her old friend Ranyinudo picks her up and calls her “Americanah,” and tells her, “You are looking at things with American eyes” (385). This shows how Ifemelu is displaced even in her homeland and that she is now a product of both the American and Nigerian cultures. Ifemelu cannot adapt quickly to her homeland when she returns, and it can be deduced that Ifemelu is placed in an in-between
space, a third space. Ifemelu is “caught between not being American in America and not being Nigerian in Nigeria” and instead becomes a hybrid who occupies a “third space” (Asmarawati 2017, 178). Ifemelu has observed the American culture with an outsider’s eye in the United States, and now Nigeria somehow also becomes foreign to her.

Ifemelu feels like a tourist in her own country; however, she also feels “guiltily grateful that she had a blue American passport in her bag. It shielded her from choicelessness. She could always leave; she did not have to stay” (Adichie 2017, 390). Towards the end of the novel, when Ifemelu returns to Nigeria, she attends a Nigerpolitician meeting with her friend Doris where “its just a bunch of people who have recently moved back, some from England, but mostly from the US” (405). During these meetings, the participants listed “the things that they missed about America,” like soymilk and good customer service (408). These people who meet and talk about their experiences in their host countries are all considered to be hybrids and they all meet to share their experiences. Towards the end of the novel, it is apparent that Ifemelu is adjusting to Nigeria and finds a new identity; she becomes a hybrid of the two cultures she encountered. It also seems that Ifemelu returns to Nigeria with a more mature and strong stance. Obinze mentions that directly to Ifemelu and tells her, “You’ve changed. […] You’re more self aware. Maybe more guarded” (432-33). Ifemelu’s hybridity is seen through a positive light, and Obinze tells her, “your blog also made me so proud. I thought: She’s gone, she’s learned and she’s conquered” (433). Stuart Hall explains that migrants “are obliged to come to terms with the new cultures they inhabit, without simply assimilating to them and losing their identities completely,” and that is exactly what Ifemelu does (1992, 310).

Obinze and Ifemelu’s experiences abroad are very different. When Obinze migrates illegally to England, he realizes that the English society identifies him in a very different manner than the ways he has been familiar with in Nigeria, which is also the case with Jemu in The Inheritance of Loss. The Nigerian culture emphasizes the dominant position of men, always placing the male on a higher pedestal. However, when Obinze arrives to England, he becomes merely a Black man and loses all the gender privilege he once had in Nigeria. Obinze becomes the ‘Other’ due to his skin color, and all the advantages he was used to in Nigeria become useless in a society that defines masculinity in terms of whiteness. Due to his race, Obinze “approached his first job with irony: he was indeed abroad cleaning toilets, wearing rubber gloves and carrying a pail” (Adichie 2017, 236). Cleaning toilets in Nigeria is a role that is usually left for women since the female
is always associated with the domestic sphere, however, as Obinze crosses geographical borders, his gender is perceived in a different manner due to his skin color. Bonvillain explains that “Obinze’s position as a black man in England strips him from the social power he had in Nigeria, yet as this realization dawns on Obinze, he also begins to see the reason he even had social power was because of gender and class hierarchies in Nigeria” (2016, 31). Obinze’s tried to become a hybrid and embrace both the English and Nigerian personas, however, he failed to do so due to his skin color and his illegal stance in England.

Aunt Uji, a minor character in Americanah, and Ifemelu’s aunt, who immigrates to the United States after her husband dies, reacts to hybridity differently. She doesn’t seem so keen on preserving her roots just like Jemu in The Inheritance of Loss, and she doesn’t seem to appear as a hybrid like Ifemelu, Sai, or Saeed Saeed. Aunt Uju re-shapes her behavior completely in order to be accepted in the American society, and in the process, discards her roots completely. When Ifemelu first meets Aunt Uju in America, she realizes that “America had subdued her” (Adichie 2017, 110). Moreover, Ifemelu realizes that her aunt pronounces her own name “you-joo instead of oo-joo” and when Ifemelu asks her why she pronounces her name differently, Aunt Uju tells her, “It’s what they call me” and then later tells her, “You are in a country that is not your own. You do what you have to do in order to succeed” (104, 119).

Aunt Uju completely disregards her roots just like Jemu in The Inheritance of Loss, and this is also evident through her relationship with her son, Dike. When Ifemelu meets Dike and speaks to him, Aunty Uju tells Ifemelu, “Please don’t speak Igbo to him,” and when Ifemelu asks why, Uju replies, “This is America. It’s different” (109). Uju tries very hard to impersonate the Americans through her accent as well. When Dike takes an item from the shelf at the grocery store, she tells him:

‘Dike, put it back’ […] with the nasal, sliding accent she puts on when she spoke to white Americans, in the presence of white Americans. Pooh-reet-back. And with the accent emerged a new persona, apologetic and self-abasing. She was overeager with the cashier. (108)

It is clearly evident that Aunt Uju is trying to exclude her Nigerian identity completely and she had “deliberately left behind something of herself, something essential, in a distant and forgotten place” (119).
In relation to Homi Bhabha’s concept of hybridity, all the characters in Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* and Adichie’s *Americanah* encounter overlaps between the West and their country of origin; however, their reaction to hybridity varies. Both novels depict the positive and negative outcomes of hybridity, and through the characters, the authors are able to explore how transnational identities are created and how individuals navigate cultural and national boundaries. In Desai’s novel, Jemu wishes to eradicate his Indian heritage and chooses to mimic the West, Biju refuses to become Westernized and clings to his own heritage and roots, Sai does not choose any sides and lets both the Indian and the English cultures to penetrate her, and Saeed Saeed is considered a malleable character who adapts to his host country without letting go of his own origin and heritage. Both Saeed and Sai are the only flexible characters in the novel who consciously embrace their hybridity and their malleable identities. Through the analysis of the major characters in the novel, it is apparent that Desai tries to suggest that there are many obstacles to transnational mobility and hybridity, and that it does not necessarily end on a happy note; however, through the character of Sai, she also tries to highlight that embracing hybridity is often the best choice one can make. In Chimimanda Adichie’s *Americanah*, Ifemelu adopts a dynamic identity when she crosses borders, whereas Aunt Uji, like both Biju and Jemu, completely resists hybridity and wants to feel rooted in only one location. William Moseley argues that “dwelling in two different places and cultures breeds hybridity and insight,” but in the case of Jemu, Biju and Aunty Uji, dwelling in two different locations and cultures has a meager transformative potential because they refuse to embrace hybridity and choose fixity instead (2014, 5). The novels, together with their authors, are inherently border-crossers since they are capable of moving beyond the limits of a single national culture. Moving beyond essentialism becomes an incentive for creativity since the border-crosser no longer identifies with any binary concepts. Individuals such as Sai, Saeed, and Ifemelu become empowered and liberated due to their multifaceted personalities, their flexibility, and their malleability.

**Works Cited**


Hooda, Ambreen. 2014. “Could Fulfillment Ever Be Felt as Deeply as Loss?: A Postcolonial Examination of the West's Influence On India As Reflected by Kiran Desai’s Portrayal of the Twentieth Century Female Education in The Inheritance of Loss.” Diss. San Antonio, TX: Trinity University.


Emerging Voices

Crossing American Borders: Reclaiming Palestinian National and Cultural Identities in Ibrahim Fawal’s On the Hills of God

Nagwa Ibrahim Dawoud*

Introduction

Ibrahim Fawal was born in Ramallah in 1933 and was forced into exile after the Palestinian nakba (catastrophe) in 1948. He travelled to the United States and received a Master’s degree in film-making. He worked with the prominent film director David Lean as “the ‘Jordanian’ first assistant director on the classic Lawrence of Arabia [1962]” (“About” 2006, 448). Fawal resided in Birmingham, Alabama, where he taught film-making and literature at Birmingham-Southern College and the University of Alabama at Birmingham (448). After 50 years of the painful memory of the Palestinian nakba, Fawal published his first literary work On the Hills of God (1998) which won the PEN Oakland Award for excellence in literature. Literature, as Susan Sontag indicates, is ultimately a dialogue and a mode of responsiveness, since one of its essential tasks is “to formulate questions and construct counterstatements to the reigning pieties” (qtd. in Popova 2013, n. pag.). This applies very well to Fawal’s novel, which as this paper argues, has efficiently managed to construct such ‘counterstatements’ to the dominant anti-Palestinian discourse in America. The struggle against Zionist settler colonialism as a representation of a ‘reigning piety’ in Palestine necessitates writing back, reclaiming one’s own history, culture, and identity. This is what Fawal attempts to do for Palestine by his novel after crossing American borders and living in exile.

Exiled in America, Fawal never ceased to be haunted by childhood and adolescence memories in Ramallah through an unending cycle of tyranny and injustice, which constitutes the constant struggle most Palestinians have lived

* Ph.D. candidate in the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University. This paper is derived from her Ph.D. thesis in-progress, entitled “Reclaiming National and Cultural Identity in Selected Irish and Palestinian Literary Works” (Cairo University), supervised by Prof. Amal Mazhar and Prof. Mona Moenes. Cairo Studies in English 2020(2): https://cse.journals.ekb.eg/
through since the mid-20th century until the present moment. The prominent Palestinian critic and writer, Jabra Ibrahim Jabr, reflects on the state of being in exile, or the ‘forced’ crossing of borders asserting that

the sense of loss in an exile is unlike any other sense of loss. It is a sense of having lost a part of an inner self, a part of an inner essence. An exile feels incomplete even though everything he could want physically were at his fingertips. He is obsessed by the thought that only a return home could do away with such a feeling, end the loss, reintegrate the inner self. (1979, 83)

Thus, with the persistence of the Palestinian issue, Fawal’s novel is a remarkable contribution to the cause being the first fictionalized English-language account of the *nakba*, the ‘catastrophe’ which befell the Palestinian nation once the state of Israel was being declared on the lands of Palestine. The events taking place in the novel start in June 1947, “Palestine's last summer of happiness” (Fawal 1998, 1). It is the last summer before the United Nations’ Partition Resolution divided Palestine into an Israeli state next to an Arab one. Thus, it marks the last summer before thousands of Palestinians would lose almost everything and start an odyssey of misery whether inside Israel, in refugee camps, or crossing borders, forming a world-wide diaspora.

The experience of diaspora is central to Palestinian nationalism. Joe Cleary believes that the political weight exercised by Palestinians exiled in Arab and Islamic societies as well as in the US represents a “significant version of what Benedict Anderson has termed ‘long-distance nationalism’” (2002, 6). These diasporas have helped to keep the Palestinian issue on the international agenda despite the vicious pressure by the Zionist lobby in the US to put the Palestinian question into oblivion or to misrepresent it by derogatory stereotypes. Although being an Israeli himself, Ilan Pappé, criticizes the stereotypical representation of Palestinian nationalism as one of terrorism in Israeli media, academic circles, and the political ‘elite’ in international arenas (2009, 127). He states that in the West, this image was accepted in many circles and affected the chances of the Palestinians having a fair hearing in the peace negotiations which began after the 1967 War. Pappé traces the construction of equating Palestinian nationalism with terrorism, and suggests the deconstruction of this narrative as the best way forward in future peace negotiations. According to Pappé, “the Israeli orientalists, especially after 9/11, strove to reaffirm in the public mind in Israel and abroad the association between Islam and Palestine, Islam and Terror or
Bill Ashcroft rightly indicates that in the case of diasporic peoples, ‘place’ might not refer to a location at all, since the formative link between identity and an actual location might have been severed. Accordingly, the place of “a diasporic person’s ‘belonging’ may have little to do with spatial location, but be situated in family, community, in those symbolic features which constitute a shared culture, a shared ethnicity or system of belief, including nostalgia for a distant homeland. It is when place is least spatial, perhaps, that it becomes most identifying” (2001, 125). This is similarly the case with Fawal’s place (Palestine) being ‘least spatial;’ it is out of his reach as the formative link between him and his actual location has been severed by Israeli colonialism. Thus, belonging to Palestine for Fawal has little to do with the spatial location of Palestine, his distant homeland. Instead, it exists in the memories of the symbolic features that constitute a shared culture and ethnicity. This kind of belonging as Ashcroft mentions becomes most identifying. Thus, this paper will examine how Fawal narrates his personal memories and the symbolic cultural features of Palestine to reclaim his homeland with all its intricate details. In doing so, he significantly affirms the national and cultural Palestinian identities whilst deconstructing the stereotypical Israeli narrative of Palestine and the Palestinians, eventually offering a different perspective to the American readers.

The novel represents a major contribution to Palestinian literature fighting for the Palestinian cause in the West, especially the US. In the forward to his seminal book *Discourse and Palestine: Power, Text and Context* (1995), Ibrahim Abu-Lughod states that the battle for determining the fate of Palestine and the Palestinians has always transcended the frontiers and borders of Palestine and the Arab world; it was fought first in Europe and then in the US (Abu-Lughod 1995, 1). Published in English in the US further stresses the novel’s intended audience and its global outreach. Robin Ostle elaborates that other Palestinian authors such as Ghassan Kanafani and Emile Habibi whose Arabic novels have been translated into English do not necessarily receive similar visibility since they “have remained locked within the specialized circles of Arabists and Middle Eastern scholars” (2006, 7).

Moreover, Fawal’s novel has received worldwide recognition as it has been translated into several other languages. Reviews of the novel similarly highlight how it helps clarify what the Palestinians have actually suffered and provides a necessary understanding of the roots of the Palestinian issue. In his review of the novel in *The Washington Post*, Michael Lee maintains that the depth of feeling
emanating from Fawal in this powerful work leaves the reader “with so much to consider and react to after the last page is turned that one cannot escape the realization that this is truly a stunning creation” (1999, 124). Lee adds that for readers who are too far removed in time or space, and who wish “to have comprehended at first-hand the nakba, or ‘catastrophe’ that deprived the Palestinians of their homes, their lands, their rights and even human compassion, this is the book that will provide that understanding” (124). Similarly, Clare Brandabur affirms that every American could learn something from such a dispassionate novel; once audiences read the novel, “they can no longer say they did not know what happened to the Palestinians in 1948. Perhaps the narrative of what happened to the Palestinians can now be seen as having a great deal to do with our own narrative as Americans and has something to tell us about who we really are as well ” (Brandabur 2002, 86).

The rise of Palestinian intellectuals in American academic and media circles has often generated vicious attacks, nevertheless, as Ella Shohat elaborates on how Edward Said was attacked by Edward Alexander in 1989 in his article “Professor of Terror.” However, their contribution in creating a counter discourse to the hegemonic Israeli discourse dominant in the US is, nevertheless, highly essential. It could be said that Edward Said himself is one of the border crossers who crossed not only American borders, but world borders to build bridges of understanding and support for the Palestinian cause. Shohat rightly points out that Palestinian intellectuals in the US are situated on the fragile borders separating culture, nationalities, and discourses; they write about the ‘East’ in the ‘West’ (1995, 221). Despite their integration within the Western culture, the Arab diaspora still speak from the ‘margins’ designated as ‘third world’ voices. Burdened with the weight of representing the Palestinian perspective, they have attempted to “transgress the Israeli national narration, to break the asymmetrical representations between Israel and Palestine in the United States, and to introduce an alternative to the Zionist master narrative” (221). Being one of those burdened intellectuals, Fawal, as a discourse maker, is producing a counter narrative to the Israeli one which represents a national version of the land of Palestine before the advent of Zionist colonialism.

Thus, after geographically crossing the American borders as an exiled Palestinian, Fawal seeks, through his novel, to cross the borders of misunderstanding by offering an authentic narration of his homeland that subvert the false representations of Palestine for the American readership. Therefore, through his novel, he metaphorically crosses the borders back to Palestine. He crosses spatial and temporal borders to a disfigured image about Palestinians and
to defy barriers of misunderstanding that deprive Palestinians of their rights and escalate their misery. Through the novel, Fawal narrates to symbolically cross the borders back and return to his cherished homeland. Working within the paradigms of border studies, memory, and postcolonial studies, this paper attempts to examine how Fawal creates an ‘archive’ that reclaims Palestinian national and cultural identities in his novel.

**Historical and Theoretical Backgrounds**

Geographically located in the eastern Mediterranean region, Palestine is at the crossroads of three continents, the ‘heart’ of the Old World. Gudrun Krämer observes that Palestine was always a land of passage because of its location as part of the fertile crescent stretching from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf and from the Taurus and Zagros Mountains in the north to the Arabian Desert in the south (2008, 1). Historically, Palestine was often referred to as the ‘Holy Land,’ a sacred entity for the three Abrahamic religions. Being so sacred, it has been the object of conflicting claims and countless vicious wars. Since the Middle Ages being the battlefield of the Crusades, Palestine, in modern history, has equally gone through a long painful history of settler colonialism under the British and Israeli enterprises. According to Joseph Massad, the 1948 War became known in Israeli ideological pronouncement as a “war of independence” and the officially named “Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel” was renamed in popular discourse as the “Declaration of Independence” (2006, 19). For the Palestinians, it was a ‘catastrophe’ that signaled the loss of their ancestral homeland and caused an ‘identity-wound’ for all Palestinians. Michael Prior points out that Israeli public relations and propaganda in collaboration with Zionist ideologues and historiographers succeeded in masking the fact that “the creation of Israel resulted in the dispossession and dispersion of another people, and that dispossession was the result of formal planning and ruthless execution” (2005, 14). Prior asserts that the events that unfolded after 1948 should be viewed within the “paradigm of ethnic cleansing: when Israel took almost 80% of Palestine, it did so through ethnic cleansing of the original population making it a community of victims” (15). Thus, as ‘a community of victims,’ Palestinians were forced into a diasporic existence, whether being internally exiled inside Israel itself, in refugee camps in nearby countries, or crossing further borders into different parts of the world.

In order to fathom the extent of Fawal’s contribution in reaching out to the American readership, it would be interesting to read Edward Said’s view in which he laments “the silence, indifference and non-involvement of the Western
world [which] perpetuate the suffering of a people who have not deserved such a long agony” (Said 1979, xxi). Thus, through their literary productions, Fawal and other Palestinian authors attempt to defy such a complex situation in which Palestinians survive. They construct a political identity that defies ‘non-existence.’ Hence, Said affirms, “we have been united as a people because the Palestinian idea (which we have articulated out of dispossession and exclusionary oppression) has a coherence to which we have all responded with positive enthusiasm” (1979, xxxvi). He rightly maintains that the Palestinian cause remains “the one uncooptable, undomesticated, and fierce national and anti-colonial cause still alive – to its adherents a source of unrealized hope and somewhat tarnished idealism, to its enemies a goad and a perdurable political ego that will neither go away nor settle into amiable nonentity” (xxviii).

**Border Studies, Memory, and Postcolonial Studies**

Theoretically, this study adopts an interdisciplinary approach, working within the paradigms of border, cultural, memory and postcolonial studies. Sergei Sevastianov et al. emphasize that it was mainly geographers and, to a lesser extent, historians, who played a pioneering role in early border studies (2015, 6). For contemporary scholars of border studies, the attention has shifted from the actual borderline, its geography, its delimitations and demarcations, to cover a variety of forms and types of social boundaries, in both their material and symbolic dimensions (7). Vladimir Kolosov points out that by the end of the last century, Border Studies, became a rapidly widening interdisciplinary field of knowledge (2015, 33). Borders are not merely geographical or political; they often exist within the same geopolitical entity. Thus, scholars often refer to the concept of a ‘symbolic boundary,’ as Anatolii Kuznetsov further elaborates while examining social, cultural, racial, and religious boundaries. Other cultural, anthropological, and ethnographic aspects are also essential to the study of boundaries in general (Kuzetsov 2015, 93).

The focus of border studies has developed from studying borders as delimiters of territorial control and ideology towards a more dynamic role of borders as bridges rather than barriers (Sevastianov et al. 2015, 7). For Claudia Smith, a border is a meeting place, a point of contact for diverse cultures and histories (2002, 1). She points out that within cultural critique, notions of borders and border crossing have become synonymous with diasporic formation since border scholarship has paved the way for diaspora studies that have focused on experiences of displacement and cultural hybridity that link racialized groups in the US to their third world countries or areas of origin. Smith rightly elaborates
that members of diaspora become conduits for the flow of information, images, and ideas across national boundaries. Their literal or symbolic forms of transborder movement undermine oppressive nation states and oppressive ideologies (3). If we try to relate this to Fawal, it could be said that he uses the American border as a point of contact, as a meeting place where he can narrate his people’s culture and history on their land of Palestine. Hence it could also be inferred that as a member of the Palestinian diaspora himself, Fawal – through his novel – is one of those ‘conduits’ for the flow of images and knowledge about Palestine for the Americans. As a result, he efficiently defies and undermines Israel’s oppressive colonial ideology.

In relation to cultural studies, Stuart Hall defines it as a discursive formation that is connected to matters of power and politics, and “to the need for change and to representations of and ‘for’ marginalized social groups” (1992, 278). Furthermore, according to Chris Barker, cultural studies is “a body of theory generated by thinkers who regard the production of theoretical knowledge as a political practice. Here knowledge is never a neutral or objective phenomenon but a matter of positionality, of the place from which one speaks, to whom, and for what purposes” (2000, 5). Hall emphasizes that questions of culture are thought of through metaphors of language, textuality, intertextuality of texts, and of texts as sources of meaning and power. Culture is also viewed through the multiplicity of meanings offered through textuality as a site of representation and resistance, and where the symbolic is a source of identity (1992, 784). For Hall, identity is about using the resources of history, language, and culture to explore how people are represented and, consequently, how they might represent themselves; identities are, therefore, “constituted within, not outside representation. They arise from the narrativization of the self” (1996, 4). Similarly, Fawal presents the Palestinian identity through his novel using the rich reservoir of Palestinian history, language, and culture to represent his people and their cause to the whole world – not only the American reader – in a way that helps Palestinians cross borders of misunderstanding and to construct bridges of understanding and support for their cause instead.

As for memory studies, Michael Rossington and Anne Whitehead maintain that memory studies extend to the fields of literary, cultural, and historical discourses. They refer to the link between the rise of memory studies and identity politics (2007, 10). Within the field of memory studies, memory has its significant function in “humans’ consciousness of themselves as having distinct identities over time” (2). Memory, with its significant role in defining subjectivities, is also vital for nation building. It is important, thus, to observe
the intersection of individual and collective memories in nation building. Rossington points out that collective memory plays an important functioning role, distinct from history, in conceiving a society’s past (Rossington and Whitehead 2007, 135). Memory is also central to postcolonial studies because of the ways in which personal and cultural memories can be used to analyze and undermine the structures of empire (9). Hence, through his novel, Fawal uses memories of his homeland as an anti-colonial strategy to dismantle and subvert the Israeli colonial discourse about Palestine.

**Place, Memory, and National Identity**

Place is the horizon of identity; it is where people locate, define, and understand their identity. Place, as Barker affirms, is, therefore, the focus of human experience, memory, desire, and identity (2000, 293). Moreover, identifying one’s ‘place’ is fundamental to the cultural impact of colonization and affects every aspect of colonized societies (Ashcroft 2001, 124). However, place is never simply a location, nor is it static, or a minor detail which colonization could easily obliterate. Like culture and identity, place is in a continual and dynamic state of formation, a process which is, for Ashcroft, intimately bound up with the culture and the identity of its inhabitants (2001, 124). It forms itself out of “the densely woven web of language, memory and cultural practice and keeps being formed by the process of living” (156). Through writing, colonized places are re-inscribed, decolonized and reclaimed; the identity of the colonized place with all its details is reclaimed in literary representations of colonized places by native writers. Ashcroft clarifies that it is in “the creative reconstruction of the lived environment, the reassertion of place in language and textuality, that the key to a deep-seated cultural transformation may be found” (124). This paper examines how such re-inscription and reclaiming of the colonized Palestinian places and, hence, the national and cultural identities of these places have been addressed in Fawal’s novel.

The story takes place in 1947 and 1948, in the fictional village of ‘Ardallah’ (Arabic for ‘the land of God’). Yousif Safi is the protagonist who spends all his time happily with his two best friends, Amin and Isaac. Christian, Muslim, and Jewish respectively, their entire lives were turned upside down with the establishment of the State of Israel. Seventeen-year-old Yousif is in love with his family, his friends, his pretty neighbor Salwa and, foremost, with his homeland, Palestine. Events escalate and Yousif’s father is killed. Yousif, his mother, and now his wife, Salwa – like all other Palestinians – are expelled from their cherished houses and beloved homeland. The novel ends with Yousif, who
Reclaiming Palestinian Identities

loses his wife Salwa during the miserable Palestinian exodus, and his mother accepting the first refuge they find in Amman, a bare room in a Jordanian house, without money, without a source of livelihood, facing a future of exile, but Yousif promises to recover the ‘stolen’ family house and homeland.

Embedded cleverly within the narrative are the daily lives of Palestinians, their life which involves customs, habits, food, celebrations, music, clothes, cooking methods, rituals, education system, housing, streets, and cities, all portrayed with their original Arabic names, thus, pointing to their solid historical existence inside Palestine. Therefore, this novel represents an archive of the Palestinians, their identity, and their usurped land’s identity. The reader, as Robin Ostle notes, is transported to a culture where friends and families, and people in general express their existence through their connectedness to the land of Palestine, where, the labels Muslim, Christian, and Jew are all designated as Palestinians (2006, 8). The title of the novel is borrowed from Jamal, the blind Musician who teaches Isaac to play the oud, when he once passionately describes the hills of Palestine as the hills of God. Ostle brilliantly indicates that on the pages of the novel, the hills, the countryside, the vegetation, the fruit, and the produce of the land have presences as vital as those of the human characters. He rightly believes that the novel is a testimony

[a]t once moving and shocking, that the Palestine that was destroyed in 1948 was a rich and delicate human fabric which has been built over many generations. Muslims, Christians, and Jews shared a common language – Arabic – and a common culture and they shared the land. That delicate fabric was destroyed rapidly and brutally creating a massive injustice. On the Hills of God is a recreation in literature of the human beings that were Palestine before 1948, most of whom now live under occupation or scattered in diasporas. (8)

Through the novel, the reader feels the painful destruction of ‘once upon a time Palestine,’ and realizes how painful it is for Palestinians these days to see Palestinian places with new names, different people, and a different identity that denies Palestinians altogether. Nevertheless, the reader still senses the figurative reclaiming of the national and cultural identities of the Palestinians’ usurped places and homeland. Bhabha rightly contends that nationalist discourses are performative, he points out that “the scraps, patches and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a national culture” (Bhabha 1990, 297). This is similarly the case in this novel, where we discover the diverse ‘scraps’
and ‘patches’ of the Palestinians’ daily lives on their lands prior to the Israeli colonial presence. Reviving the memory of such daily life details is a remarkably effective strategy; such a narration of daily mundane existence serves as an anti-colonial resistance.

**Pre-Colonial Memory of Ardallah**

The pre-colonial memory of Ardallah is an effective anti-colonial strategy. As a fictional place, Ardallah, for many critics, is very much like Ramallah, the author’s birthplace (*ard* is Arabic for ‘land,’ with the added connotation of the sacred name *Allah*, which Arabs from the three main religions use for God, it is the land belonging to God). Ardallah combines characteristics common to the land of Palestine as a whole, thus, both a land and culture that combine the three Abrahamic religions. This is very clear through the three young Palestinian friends who are in their last year of high school, “Yousif was Christian, Amin Muslim, Isaac Jewish. […] They had gone through elementary and secondary school together. Together they had switched from shorts to pants. […] They were so often together that the whole town began to accept them as inseparable” (Fawal 1998, 16).

Early in the novel, Fawal reclaims the identity of Palestine as the land of the three religions. Jews were treated well and integrated in the Arab culture of Palestine, unlike the persecution and isolation they often struggled with within some Western cultures. Fawal highlights this fact through Dr. Jameel Safi, Yousif’s father, who tells Yousif and Isaac that Yousif’s mother nursed both of them for over a month; “[so] in a sense you’re brothers” (1998, 122). Sara, Isaac’s mother, asserts that Zionists who came from Europe “looked for ways to stop us from mixing with the Arabs” (122). Dr. Jameel then remarks, “in Jerusalem, there used to be a tradition among Jews and Muslims. Children of both faiths who were born on the same day were breasted by both mothers. And they used to take this relationship very seriously” (122). Moshe, Isaac’s father, further comments: “but in the late twenties, that was the first thing the Zionists stopped. They did not want the two communities to mingle” (123). Thus, Fawal is writing back in an attempt to reclaim the identity of not only Jerusalem, but the whole of Palestine, people from different religions used to live together in harmony and only when Europeans imposed themselves, did things fall apart.

By the end of the novel, Fawal even stresses this through the dialogue between Yousif and his school principal *Ustaz* Saadeh when Yousif tells him that “the West persecuted the Jews” and he replies, “We didn’t” (374). Saadeh’s answer documents a fact that maybe several readers did not know about; he adds:
“well, of course. And not only the Germans. The Russians, Spanish, French, and British before them. Britain threw them out for centuries. America won’t even let them join her country clubs. Your father and I were in America and we know their gentlemen’s agreement” (374). Memory, thus, plays a pivotal role in subverting the hegemony of colonial history by offering alternative versions of established archives (Rossington and Whitehead 2007, 9). Furthermore, collective memory plays an important functioning role, distinct from history, in conceiving a society’s past. Similar personal and collective memories in the novel documenting how Jews were treated in Palestine, in contrast to how they were often treated in the West, offer a counter discourse to the Israeli hegemonic discourse that denies such facts.

Reclaiming Palestinian Character and Geography

In depicting Yousif, Amin, Issac, Dr. Jameel, Ustaz Saadeh, and many other characters, Fawal is dismantling misrepresentations and stereotypes about Palestinians that were created by the Israeli colonial discourse. In his seminal book *The Question of Palestine* (1979), Said observes that since its founding, Israel has enjoyed “an astonishing dominance in matters of scholarship, political discourse, international presence, and valorization. … Its miraculous transformation of an ‘arid and empty land’ gained universal admiration” (xiv). In accordance with this, Israel has been taken to represent the best in the Western and Biblical traditions; citizens of Israel were soldiers, farmers, scientists and artists. In contrast, Palestinians were seen as “Arabs” or anonymous creatures that only disrupt and disfigure a wonderful idyllic narrative. Even in children’s literature, Said notes that valiant Jews always end up killing deceitful Arabs with derogatory names like *Mastoul* (crazy), *Bandura* (tomato), or *Bukra* (tomorrow). As for Palestinian acts of resistance, Said elaborates, Israeli politicians, soldiers, diplomats, and intellectuals characterize Palestinians as terrorists and nonhuman “cockroaches, grasshoppers, two legged vermin” (xxi). Against these derogatory stereotypes, Fawal depicts his characters as ambitious students – such as Yousif who wishes to pursue his education like his father in Columbia University in the USA –, teachers, lawyers, doctors, and artists etc., in order to subvert the Israeli colonial narrative that denies their existence. However, when Golda Meir, the former Israeli prime minister, was often asked about Palestinians: “Who are the Palestinians?” she repeatedly answered, “There is no such thing” (qtd in Kayyali 1977, 111).

Moreover, intentionally depicting the intricate details of Palestinians’ lives in their homeland Ardallah, Fawal portrays how doctor Jameel Safi is seen
Nagwa Ibrahim Dawoud

celebrating moving to his new modern prestigious villa with the people of Ardallah after ten years of preparation on the Palestinian land. Land or ard in Arabic is the core of the Palestinian identity. According to Fawaz Turki, the land, as a real entity and a metaphor, is the most dominating presence in Palestinian literature; “Landhood,” as he coins it, “is the raison d’être of Palestinian being and consciousness” (Turki 1981, 373). Hence, Fawal reclaims the Palestinian spatial identity through depicting the geography of Ardallah which was a town thirty miles northwest of Jerusalem and fifteen miles east of Jaffa. […] Only Ramallah, a town fifteen miles to the east and a better-known resort, surpassed Ardallah in the number of vacationers who arrived every summer. […] They came to Ardallah from the seashores of Jaffa and Haifa, and from the fertile fields and orchards of Lydda and Ramleh. […] Ardallah sat as a crown on seven hills from which could be seen a spectacular panorama of rolling hills and, on a clear day, a glimpse of the blue Mediterranean waters. (Fawal 1998, 19-20)

Thus, in reclaiming the geography of Palestine, the memory of such places, their location, and the insertion and affirmation of these Arabic names is a counter discourse to the Israeli colonial discourse that has presented Palestine as a desert, a waste land, sparsely populated by Bedouins. He also resists the change imposed on the topography of the land, and which even referred to Palestinian places using Hebrew names. Ardallah, which one can consider as a metaphor for the whole of Palestine, was a prestigious modern place. It had prestigious institutions: schools for boys and girls, mosques, churches, banks, clubs, restaurants, and hotels. It was not a waste land, or a desert waiting for Zionists to make it bloom.

This depiction of Ardallah is very significant as it represents a counter discourse to the Zionist myth that proclaims Palestine as ‘a land without a people to be given to a people without a land.’ Instead, the reader feels the details of a place or a homeland that once existed, with its trees, breeze, buildings, and villages. This is a kind of topographical record of the Palestinian land, of the Palestinian cities and villages that later on were destroyed, rebuilt, and renamed by the Israeli colonialists. Fawal is inserting and bringing the names of the lost Palestinian cities back in his narrative, this is what Ashcroft calls postcolonial transformation that involves the insertion of “a contestatory voice” and a
different version of the colonial historical discourse (2001, 103). Thus, Fawal figuratively retrieves the topography of Ardallah, i.e. Palestine:

Built 2500 feet above sea level, Ardallah was a natural landmark. Between Ardallah and the Mediterranean sea lay Jaffa, Lydda, and Ramleh, which were surrounded by hundreds of orange groves; between Ardallah and the highlands lay hundreds of Arab villages surrounded by fig and olive groves and pasture lands. (1998, 20)

Reflecting on the names and borders of Palestine, Krämer maintains that in the context of the Jewish-Arab conflict over Palestine, places and their names have acquired a great significance to all efforts trying to legitimize historical rights to the land. To be able to establish the names of things is an indicator of political and cultural power. Thus, the various terms utilized to designate the land of Palestine reflect prevailing power relations. The Jewish claim to Palestine as the Land of Israel (Eretz Yisrael) bases itself on biblical narratives and affirms the constant presence of the Jewish people on this land. Krämer views this perspective as both distorted and distorting, as it affects the presentation of the land, its people, and its history: “it places the Jews at the center, pushing all other population groups (even if and when they formed a majority) into the background, if it considers them at all” (2008, 2). As a result, he states, “Palestine or Eretz Israel, offers a textbook case of the territorialization of history, in which political claims are anchored in historical geography” (3). On a similar vein, in his narration of the Palestinian land, Fawal offers a reterritorialization of history and geography where he brings all the marginalized groups and neglected facts back to the center.

For Palestine to be ‘a land without a people for a people without a land,’ the Israelis expelled the majority of the Palestinians to render their vision into a reality. Evidence of Palestinian existence had to be erased through the desertification of Palestinian land to prove the Zionist claim of making the desert prosper. This has been systematically done since 1948 with the Israeli military and settlement activities uprooting hundreds of thousands of Palestinian farms and trees especially olive and orange trees (Massad 2006, 176). Himself an Israeli professor, Israel Shahak, states that:

The truth about Arab settlement which used to exist before 1948, is one of the most guarded secrets of Israeli life […] so that the accepted official myth of ‘an empty country’ can be taught and
accepted in the Israeli schools and told to visitors. [...] This falsification is especially grave as it is accepted universally, outside the Middle East, and because the villages were destroyed completely, with their houses, garden walls, and even cemeteries, so that literally a stone does not remain standing, and visitors are passing and being told that “it was all desert.” (qtd. in Massad 2006, 39)

Therefore, Fawal is attempting to subvert this ‘falsification’ through addressing the Western readers offering them another narrative in which he presents the Palestinian story and the Palestinians’ version of this land. Later on through the memory of Amin’s house, Fawal again reclaims the identity of these Palestinian houses which are hundreds of years old:

the thick muddy looking walls had grass growing on them and looked as old as the Roman arch [...] women sat in knots on the flat rooftops or against walls. They gossiped and darned clothes or combed and braided their waist-length hair. Smoke rose from behind an enclosure where a woman crouched to bake her bread [...] children jumped rope and played hopscotch. (Fawal 1998, 27-28)

These details of the place not only affirm the existence of Palestinians on their land, but also represent and reclaim the hundreds of years that Palestinian cultural identity existed and flourished in this place. Thus, this is the narrative identity of the place, of the people through their daily lives as portrayed in the novel: women darning, combing, baking, children playing, etc. These are the signs of a people’s culture on their land that is far from being arid or deserted. Describing Al-Andalus Hotel, the narrator says, “tables were covered with white cloths. The crystal glasses and silverware glistened. The entire garden, on both sides of the canopied dance floor, glittered with colored lights strung between the big, tall, hundred-year-old-trees” (Fawal 1998, 37). Even the name of the hotel “Al-Andalus” recalls the memory of a lost Arab territory that draws an affinity with the more recently lost Palestine.

Zionist Colonial Discourse

Documenting samples of Zionist discourse about Palestine in the period from 1865 to 1920, Said cites some discourse makers such as those stated by C.R.
Conder in his “Present Condition of Palestine.” He describes the native peasantry as “brutally ignorant, fanatical, stupid, and above all, inveterate liars, which can only be found in Orientals” (qtd in Said 1979, 80). Lord Kitchener also writes in the Survey of Galilee: “we hope to rescue from the hands of that ruthless destroyer, the uneducated Arab […] the synagogue of Capernaum” (qtd in Said 1979, 80). Against such derogatory misrepresentations, Palestinian literature writes back. In the novel, Fawal is refuting such colonial claims by depicting Palestinians as well-educated doctors, thoughtful teachers, lawyers, students, skillful peasants and workers, passionate lovers, stressing the prestigious lifestyle which Palestinians led in their homeland before the ominous advent of Zionist occupation.

As Abu-Lughod states that the battle for determining the fate of Palestine has been fought in Europe and the US, Palestinian Arabs and European Jewish settlers (later on Israeli settlers) confronted each other daily for the retention of the national patrimony, or for its possession respectively:

In important respects the battle for the consciousness […] of outsiders turned out to be crucial in determining the favorable outcome of the first and second major ‘battles’ for Palestine: that of 1948 […] and that of 1967. […] The Declaration of Principles [1993] signified Israel’s success in finally ‘winning the war’ against the Palestinians. […] The issue now is the extent to which the evolving discourse on the continuing contest, albeit in altered form, will bear the imprint of the hardened discourse of the past. (Abu-Lughod 1995, 1)

Fawal, like other Palestinian writers writing in English targeting a wider American and Western readership, is trying to erase and refute that ‘hardened discourse of the past’ by creating their own discourse, by inserting the Palestinian version of the history of the land of Palestine in their works.

**Pre-Colonial Memory of Al-Quds**

Jerusalem, or Al-Quds, is of extreme importance to Muslims, Jews, and Christians. Thus, another important reclaiming of the national identity of the Palestinian land is through Yousif’s visit to the sacred city of Al-Quds with his mother, who was visiting her sick sister Widad; this was her hometown. She wanted to light a candle at the Qiyameh, Holy Sepulchre and see her parents. The narrator tells how some of Yousif’s “happiest recollections resonated around
this sacred and blessed city of shrines, temples, minarets, and domes. From childhood, he had loved everything about Jerusalem: the old and the new, the visits with his grandparents in the old district of Musrara and with his cousins up at modern Qatamon” (Fawal 1998, 101). This description of the holy city, with its sounds and smells, is indeed a reaffirmation of the Palestinian identity of the city. It is the city of churches and mosques, of rabbis, priests, and shaykhs, the city of the old sacred places and the new modern buildings; it was Palestinian with all of its details.

Jerusalem in particular is very central to the Palestinians’ self-image. As Rashid Khalidi rightly maintains, it is important today as a space, and historically, over time, as an anchor for identity (Khalidi 1997, 18). Jerusalem, apart from its religious prominence, was also important for the inhabitants of Palestine as an administrative center, all the more so after 1874, when it became the capital of an independent sanjaq, which sent one deputy to the Ottoman parliaments and three to those of 1908-1918. In his significant book Palestinian Identity (1997), Khalidi further explains how this sense of Palestine as a country went back to the “Fada’l al-Quds” (merits of Jerusalem) literature which portrayed Jerusalem and other holy sites and notable places throughout Palestine. This includes the historical cities of Hebron, Jericho, Bethlehem, Nablus, al-Ramla, Safad, Ascalon, Acre, Gaza, and Nazareth. All such cities were remarkable sites for pilgrims and visitors who get to experience Palestine from within, and for the devout and inquisitive in general elsewhere. Kahlidi points out that these names suggest that a clear idea of the rough boundaries of Palestine are in essence “a sort of sacred—if not yet a national—space [which] already existed in the minds of authors and readers of this Islamic devotional literature. A similar idea existed for Christians, as well as for Jews” (Kahlidi 1997, 29).

Jerusalem was also significant for its cultural life. The press, schools, clubs, political parties, and other aspects of intellectual life all had a massive impact on the cultural richness of the city (Khalidi 1997, 35). The novel sheds some light on this cultural dimension like, for example, when Yousif and his mother visit the Khalidiyeh Library at the corner of the Jewish Quarter (Fawal 1998, 105). It is significant to observe how Rashid Khalidi got the idea for his important book during his involvement in the restoration of the Khalidiyeh family library in Jerusalem that gradually led him to the idea of exploring the intellectual history of Jerusalem (Khalidi 1997, vii). Khalidi also stresses a unique source for understanding Jerusalem’s cultural life by the end of the 19th century, which was the holding of family libraries in Jerusalem, such as Al-maktaba al-khalidiyya (Khalidiyeh Library) and Al-maktaba al-budayriyya (Budayriyya Library),
Reclaiming Palestinian Identities

beside *Maktabat-ul-Aqsa* (Al-Aqsa Library) (1997, 42). Unfortunately, such facts were intentionally obliterated by Zionist European settlers who expropriate and re-label antiquities to serve their own interests. They can impose their authority on narratives that give “weight to selected strata, thereby successfully manipulating both spatial and temporal aspects of identity, in pursuit of a clear nationalist political agenda. Their success can be seen from the tides of foreign tourists that choke the narrow alleys of the Old City for much of the year, most of them in groups led by Israeli tour guides propagating a specific version of the city’s history” (Khalidi 1997, 18). Furthermore, Khalidi inquires how a Palestinian version would look like instead, wondering about the possibility of producing a multidimensional narrative that would reproduce the whole history of Jerusalem instead of reducing the complexity of the city’s history to a single narrow dimension (1997, 18). Thus, it could be said that Fawal responds to such inquiries through inserting a narrative of the history of the land of Palestine with all of its holy cities and sites in the novel, offering a new version that subverts the hegemonic colonial one. Fawal’s narrative is an archival documentation not only of the history of the Holy City, but also of its topography and cultural life that the Israeli settlers have been keen on erasing.

**Pre-Nakba Zionist Aggression**

In order to subvert such faulty Zionist representations of Palestine to the American and Western readership, the novel, on the other hand, documents the terrorism that Zionists have systematically initiated and escalated in Palestinian cities during those days before *nakba*. For example, the novel sets Jerusalem as the scene for many explosions designed by Zionists. Some of those explosions take place while Yousif and his mother are actually there in the city: “down the street the bomb went off with a horribble, deafening blast. But the screaming was even louder than the sound of the explosion” (Fawal 1998, 104). In their rush to escape, Yousif and his mother also pass by King David Hotel, “which the Zionist underground terrorist organization, the Irgun, had bombed fourteen months earlier, killing ninety-six innocent people, wounding many more, and shocking the whole civilized world” (107). In a later scene again, Yousif and his mother witness another devastating explosion of two barrels of dynamite that exploded “with a deafening roar. [...] Spilled gas and oil quickly burst into flames” (110). The heartbreaking damage and casualties caused by such explosions is unfathomable. Moreover, in an attempt to document the horridness of the scene, one photographer tries recording the events, but, unfortunately, only to add to the scene’s gruesomeness. Yousif sees the man’s camera twisted and “tongues
of fire lapping up his legs […] touched and horrified Yousif […] saw that the man had already been charred. Fire was consuming him like a bag of bones” (Fawal 1998, 108). A few seconds later, “both sides of the street were littered with bodies. […] The stink of gas, rubber, cordite, and flesh filled the air” (109). The novel, thus, alludes to the fact that the murdering of the photographer is ultimately symbolic of how Zionist colonialists constantly seek to hide all traces to their crimes.

Hence, it is through such diverse atrocities that Zionists tried to ‘de-Palestinize’ Jerusalem and other cities while intimidating their inhabitants to leave their native land. This uncovering of what happened in the holy city and the atrocities committed by Zionist colonialists is Fawal’s method of overturning false Zionist claims often propagated to Western readers through Zionist-led media platforms. Nevertheless, Edward Said observes how Israel is often represented in the American public discourse and worldwide as a nation in search of peace, while the Arabs are “bent on extermination, and prey to irrational violence” (1979, xiv). Said points out that the Middle East provides evidence of a direct connection between media practices and public policy where media representations could easily reinforce the use of force and brutality against native societies. Trying to dismantle such stereotypical images especially for the American reader, Fawal, on the contrary, portrays Palestinians as individuals seeking peace and development rather than violence or chaos. For instance, Yousif is represented as a peaceful young man whose heart is in pain for all the victims of such aggressive explosions. Moreover, early in the novel, when events escalated in 1947, Yousif also supports his father who adamantly refuses to use an allocated sum of money to buy weapons since the people of Ardallah had originally decided to save this sum to build a hospital instead.

**Pre-Colonial Memory of Haifa and Jaffa**

In order to offer an authentic representation to his readers, Fawal recurrently refers to historical facts about prominent cities, most notably are Haifa and Jaffa. This includes the narration of Haifa ‘exodus’ or the burning of Jaffa by Yousif’s relatives who came seeking shelter to Ardallah after the horrific events they witnessed. Moreover, this is represented also through Yousif’s visits to his cousin, Bassim, on the hill where Palestinian fighters were defending Ardallah against Zionist attacks; Yousif could see

*Jaffa, a town as Arab as London is British. Yet at its harbor, ship after ship come full of Jewish refugees* bent on making Jaffa their
own! It boggled his mind that the Jews could even think it possible. Palestine was theirs but not his? Ridiculous! [...] Did the Jewish immigrants grow up in Palestine? Did they have an inalienable birthright to it but he didn’t? What a travesty on logic! Did they play on these hills and in these valleys? [...] did they pick almonds and figs and olives and oranges off the trees in the plush orchards that dotted the land of Palestine? did they swim on the shores of Jaffa and Haifa and float on the salty waters of the Dead Sea? (Fawal 1998, 277; italics mine)

Such rhetorical questions help alert Western readers to the false claims of Zionists to the land by offering facts on the ground which would be more appealing to the Western mentality. According to Khalidi, Haifa and Jaffa were centers of commercial, cultural, and intellectual activities. By 1948, both cities had the largest Arab population in any of the cities in the country. He affirms that they had dynamism in so many spheres that “significantly affected the shaping of Palestinian identity” (Khalidi 1997, 36). For Palestinians, those dearly cherished cities were political, social, economic, and cultural beacons. That is why they were among the primary targets of the Zionist colonization of Palestine. Hence, it is a logical outcome to find Haifa and Jaffa, along with Jerusalem, among the recurrent motifs in Palestinian literature. The burning of Jaffa, the expulsion from Haifa, and the recurrent explosions in Jerusalem are all among the common scenes in Palestinian literature.

Yousif, with his attachment to the Palestinian land with all of its details, asks questions that reclaim and reaffirm the Arab identity not only of Jaffa and Haifa, but the whole of Palestine. Fawal attempts to illuminate the more hidden, suppressed, marginalized aspects of Palestinian history and of the land of Palestine itself. In order to be convincing to his American readership, he is archiving the existence of Palestinians through their daily lives inside Palestine. He offers, thus, the Palestinian version of the story of Palestine that he believes has been forced into silence by the Israeli colonial discourse and was not allowed to reach the Western reader who, on the other hand, has usually been offered the manipulated Israeli version alone. Massad even observes how Israeli propaganda sometimes proposes that Palestinians, after all, had emigrated to Palestine seeking a more revived economic climate which was brought about by European Jewish colonization (2006, 25).
Reclaiming Palestinian Cultural Identity

In an interview with Liana Badr, Palestinian national poet Mahmoud Darwish states “I am disconcerted by the absence of the place, of its veritable attributes, in a poetry that pretends to celebrate it. I don’t find in Palestinian poetry the flora and fauna, the landscape, in other words the real Palestine” (qtd. in Khamis and Rahman 2008, 3). In Fawal’s novel, however, the flora and fauna and the landscape of Palestine are very present, and this is part of reclaiming the cultural and national identity of the land. Palestinians have a sacred relation to the land and this is clear through the novel’s portrayal of the richness of Palestinian lands frequently referring to the trees, fruits, and orchards. As Ghassan Kanafani entitles one of his famous short stories “The Land of the Sad Oranges” (1958), Fawal is similarly keen on documenting the fact that Palestine was a major exporter of the world’s oranges before 1948. Yousif’s mother, for example, exclaims as she watches two men unload a pickup truck packed with boxes of oranges, which were a gift from a family friend they had visited a few days earlier: “the stack of boxes was now getting taller than the men” (Fawal 1998, 56). The act of Palestinian generosity, the fertility of the land, and the expertise of the Palestinians who planted the land are all foregrounded through the narrative. Later on, the thought of war and the taste of oranges reminded Yousif that “the big, juicy, fragrant Jaffa orange was Winston Churchill’s favorite fruit […] during World War II, Churchill always had special oranges shipped to him from Palestine” (57).

The novel moves from the memory of Jaffa’s orange produce to the memory of Palestinian food in general. As an integral cultural feature, food is a signifier and marker of identity. Roland Barthes clarifies that food constitutes sets of information; it signifies “a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior” (1961, 24). He explains that food “brings the memory of the soil” (27). Every country has its own type of food with its unique ingredients brought from the soil of that country. Furthermore, the methods of how such food is prepared shed light on the lifestyle, customs, and culture at large. Early in the novel, when Dr. Safi celebrates moving to his new villa, most families in Ardallah are keen to come bringing different types of Palestinian national food, in particular manasef: “women began to arrive from all directions carrying manasef” (Fawal 1998, 11).

Through this celebration, Fawal also stresses the intimate relationships among the families of different religions. The wooden bowls of manasef
were brought by Christian and Muslim families; by rich and poor […] the family of Moshe and Sarah Sh’lan, Isaac’s parents […] instead of contributing the usual manasef, they had ordered two large trays of kinafeh from Nablus – a town twenty miles to the northeast and famous for its pastries – and paid a taxi driver an outrageous fare to drive all the way to pick them up. (1998, 11)

On other occasions in the novel, the narrator frequently speaks about traditional Palestinian dishes using their Arabic names, such as mujadarah, makhloba kinafeh, hummus, manasef with all its typical ingredients. This includes lamb, rice, bread, maraca (soup), and fried pine nuts. Referring to pine nuts is significant as well since the Palestinian pine tree is also another important national symbol. Traditional methods of preparing such meals is also delineated in an endeavour to further preserve the Palestinian food memory, another effective reclaiming of the Palestinian cultural identity at large. However, in their incessant attempts to obliterate Palestinian cultural features, many Israelis in the novel would claim their ownership of such meals instead. Thus, throughout the novel, Fawal intentionally asserts the Palestinian identity of the native cultural heritage through not only the reference to traditional dishes and their age-old recipes, but also other aspects, such as education, art, and music.

Fawal documents information about school systems, churches, universities, banks, prestigious hotels, and restaurants to affirm that Palestine before the nakba was already a modern state. He also portrays how Palestinians used to celebrate different social occasions such as weddings, graduation ceremonies, and funerals. The traditional songs and customs of such events are equally highlighted. He even delineates how women used to dress: “although the great majority of Arab women in town did wear modern western dresses, most were on the conservative side, and quite a few still wore the traditional ankle-length and heavily embroidered native costumes” (Fawal 1998, 17). Significantly, Fawal did not forget to document and reclaim the older Palestinian national anthem which was written by the Palestinian poet Ibraheem Touqan—older brother of Fadwa Touqan, Palestine’s national poetess. It was announced as the official national anthem in 1937.

Moreover, commenting on the earlier British colonization, the people of Ardallah are portrayed while being imprisoned by British soldiers inside the Roman Catholic Church after inspecting Palestinian houses for holding weapons. While Ustaz Hakim was giving a speech commenting on the escalating events at that time, one of the crowd shouts “Long Live Palestine” and another
starts chanting “Mowtini” (my homeland) before the whole crowd in the church sings along:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Mowtini, Mowtini,} \\
\text{Glory and beauty,} \\
\text{Sublimity and splendor,} \\
\text{Are in your hills,} \\
\text{We, young men, will never get tired,} \\
\text{Our concern is to be either independent or annihilated.} \\
\text{We would rather drink death,} \\
\text{Than be slaves to our enemy. (Fawal 1998, 192)}
\end{align*}
\]

Beside, being part of the cultural heritage of Palestine, this traditional defiant and patriotic song is also a proof that Palestinians are used to fighting and resisting different forms of colonization across their history.

**Pre-Nakba Historical Context**

In this archival novel, Fawal documents Palestinian resistance through significant historical events and figures, most prominently national heroes and martyrs. Through Basim, Yousif’s cousin, Fawal documents Palestinian armed resistance and how people of Ardallah were raising fund for arms to protect the city. This is a counter discourse for another Zionist myth that represents Palestinians as meek sellers of their lands. For example, in his book *Palestinian Collective Memory and National Identity* (2009), published by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Meir Litvak represents the Israeli colonial discourse which insists that “the weakness of Palestinian national identity and cohesion [is seen through] the sale of land to Jews by Palestinian landlords and the clandestine cooperation of a large number of Palestinians with the Zionists, mostly for financial benefit” (2009, 3). This is a typical discourse that Israeli colonialists often propagate not only in Europe and the US, but even in neighbouring Arab countries. Some Arabs, especially the young generation, circulate such myths of cowardice and greediness ignoring the long history of Palestinian resistance being unaware of the misery that the majority of Palestinians have suffered. This lack of awareness negatively affects Arab solidarity with the Palestinian cause, in consequence. Hence, the documentation of some horrendous crimes committed by Zionist colonialists in the novel, such as the Deir Yassin massacre and the atrocities of Haifa and Jaffa exodus, is central to the understanding of the Palestinian struggle. Thus, through narrating
such incidents, Fawal is crossing borders of misunderstanding and building bridges of understanding, sympathy, and support for the Palestinian cause instead.

For example, defying deceitful Israeli colonial discourse, Fawal documents significant painful national wounds while simultaneously documenting the Palestinian resistive efforts. Through the figure of Abd al-Qadir Al-Husayni, a prominent figure of Palestinian resistence, Fawal is asserting the national identity of Palestinians as freedom fighters and revolutionaries. It is through him also that Fawal documents important historical events and fights such as the battle of Bab-al-Wad:

In five weeks the British would be gone by May 15th and the battle for the control of Jerusalem was already raging [...] the Palestinians, led by their ablest commander, Abd al-Qadir, had repeatedly pinned them down at the bottleneck at Bab al Wad. [...] Abd al Qadir – an honest man doing honest work. [...] Handsome, stout, and with bandoleer crisis-crossing his chest, he looked like the Palestinians’ best hope to thwart Zionists’ pipe dream. (1998, 200)

Fawal reveals the collusion between British and Zionist colonialists as they evacuate Palestine in May, instead of August, thus, before the time designated by the UN Resolution. He represents the character of Al-Husayni in contrast to the stereotypical configurations of Palestinians often disseminated in Israeli colonial discourse. He also documents the Palestinian Revolt and the anti-Zionist immigration movement (1936-1939) upon which the British government issued a White Paper in 1939 that yielded to Arab demands. Several of such historical events are frequently overlooked within the colonial discourse. Thus, Abdelwahab Elmessiri elaborates on how discourse ultimately serves exploitation schemes. He asserts that part of the tactics of colonial discourse is to isolate terms and phenomena from their historical contexts (Elmessiri 2003, 42). Elmessiri argues that the Zionist entity was forcefully implanted by imperial powers as “a strange human block in the midst of the Arab world, a block which turned to a state that works for the imperial sponsor” (42). He states that the conflict is rooted in the displacement of Palestinians by colonial settlers which took place as a result of the Arabs’ refusal of the UN partition plan of Palestine in 1948 (42). Consequently, colonialists resorted to the representation of Arabs as
‘barbarians’ who kill the peaceful settlers and hence the result turns into a cause and Zionism is thus presented not as a settler colonialist movement but as an achievement of the Jewish dream of returning to the promised land while resistance is presented as unjustified terrorism and the Israeli attacks are presented as self-defense and the Israeli army is presented as the Israeli defense army. (42)

Furthermore, for Frantz Fanon, the struggle against colonialism involves claiming back the history of colonized people away from the distorted version produced by the colonizer who constantly aims at tarnishing it. Thus, Fanon calls for “a passionate research […] directed by the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-contempt […] some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others” (1994, 37). Such a ‘passionate research’ for ‘hidden histories’ is similarly reiterated by Stuart Hall who asserts that it is rather a practice that entails “the production of identity […]. We should not, for a moment, underestimate or neglect the importance of the act of the imaginative rediscovery which this conception of a rediscovered, essential identity entails” (393). Moreover, Bill Ashcroft emphasizes that the transformation of history stands as one of the most strategic and powerfully effective modes of cultural resistance. A key strategy in this transformation is “the interpolation of historical discourse. This involves not only the insertion of a contestatory voice, a different version […] but an entry into the discourse which disrupts its discursive features and reveals the limitations of the discourse itself […] it is in the literary texts that some of the most disruptive and evocative potentialities of historical interpolation may occur” (Ashcroft 2001, 103).

Conclusion

For Palestinians, identity is the most painful aspect of their history. Khalidi emphasizes that the quintessential Palestinian experience takes place at borders, airports, checkpoints, at any one of those many modern barriers where identities are checked and verified. Borders are a problem for Palestinians “since their identity not only is subject to question by the powers that be; but also is in many contexts suspect almost by definition” (Khalidi 2). At those barriers, every Palestinian is exposed to harassment and exclusion because of his or her identity. Khalidi refers to the ominous words often said by border guards “step out of line and follow me” as depressingly familiar to Palestinians at crossing points amongst several other painful stories of exclusion and denial that Palestinians
could easily relate to (3). Fawal is one of those border crossers who has suffered such agony related to the Palestinian identity, and maybe such painful incidents of border crossing pushed him to write *On the Hills of God* to reclaim Palestinian national and cultural identities.

In conclusion, Fawal represents through his novel a narrative where the domains of history, memory, identity, and literature are unmistakably interrelated. Highlighting the significant connection between history and literature, Sontag stresses that “literature might be described as the history of human responsiveness to what is alive and what is moribund as cultures evolve and interact with one another” (qtd. in Popova 2013, n. pag.). Thus, throughout their national and cultural struggles, Palestinian authors have produced literature that narrates and writes back to repressive colonial representations. For Edward Said nations are formed through narrations. The narrative is a method which colonized people use to “assert their own identity and the existence of their own history” (1993, xiii). For him, culture is ultimately “a source of identity… It can even be a battleground on which causes expose themselves to the light of day and contend with one another” (xiii). One can say that literature is a source of history as it offers an alternative disruptive version of hegemonic colonial delineations. The fictional narrative of Fawal does not only provide a historical account of Palestine, but it is a kind of topographical record of the Palestinian land, of the Palestinian cities and villages that were destroyed, rebuilt and renamed by Israeli colonialization in an attempt to obliterate the people’s original identity. Identities, as Hall elaborates, are constructions that arise from the “narrativization of the self” (1996, 4). Fawal’s novel, thus, ‘narrates’ the Palestinian land with its cherished details. It narrates the loss and dispossession that Palestinians experience hoping to re-possess in literature what has been lost in reality.

Although the actual physical crossing of borders is usually a painful experience to most Palestinians, some of them, nevertheless, attempt to bridge such borders to achieve a better understanding of their cause through their literary productions. Literature, as Sontag maintains, is “the passport to enter a larger life; that is the zone of freedom” (qtd. in Popova 2013, n. pag.). Fawal metaphorically crosses borders of time and space back to Palestine to defy oppressive Israeli representations of the Palestinians and their existence on their homeland prior to the establishment of Israel. However, as Paul Ricoeur emphasizes, history begins and ends with the reciting of a tale (Ricoeur 1995, 224). He asserts that narrative is a redefining of what is already defined, a reinterpretation of what is already interpreted (224). He adds that the future is
“guaranteed by the ability to possess a narrative identity, to collect the past in historical or fictive form” (224). Hence, although Israel often defines and portrays Palestinians for American and Western audiences in derogatory misrepresentations, Fawal is able to ‘redefine’ and ‘reinterpret’ the Palestinian image in an attempt to guarantee a more promising future when he, and other members of the Palestinian diaspora, are able to cross the borders back and return to Palestine.

Works Cited


While writing about immigrants and border crossings arguably dates back to the signing in 1884 of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which resulted in the annexation by the United States of almost half Mexican territories, Marta Caminero-Santangelo’s *Documenting the Undocumented: Latino/a Narratives and Social Justice in the Era of Operation Gatekeeper* (2016) focuses on the emergence of texts that came to be known as post-Gatekeeper narratives. These refer to texts written after the launch in 1994 of Operation Gatekeeper in California, which was followed by similar operations, including Operation Safeguard in 1995 in Arizona and Operation Río Grande in 1997 in Texas. Those operations marked the start of an era in which heavy policing of the US-Mexican border drove potential immigrants away from the relatively safe crossings, mostly located in urban areas, and forced them into taking dangerous routes through deserts and mountains, often with fatal consequences. In addition to doubling the number of immigrants who do not survive the journey, the experience to which those who make it to the other side or back to their homelands are exposed is more scarring, hence increasing the intensity of the resulting trauma. Documenting this trauma, which not only includes the actual crossing but also encompasses its impact on victims’ families and border communities, is the focus of Caminero-Santangelo’s study on narratives of the post-Gatekeeper era.

Caminero-Santangelo brings together different types of narratives about undocumented immigrants that include fiction, literary journalism, and testimonials. Whereas the main focus of the book is actual border crossings from Mexico, Caminero-Santangelo also tackles the case of Caribbean immigrants, how different they are from their Mexican counterparts, and the impact of metaphorical borders on their experience. Chapter 1, “Narrating the Non-Nation: Literary Journalism and ‘Illegal’ Border Crossings,” deals with three works of narrative journalism: Luis Alberti Urrea’s *The Devil’s Highway: A True Story* (2004), Rubén Martínez’s *Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail* (2001), and Sonia Nazario’s *Enrique’s Journey: The Story of a Boy’s Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother* (2006). In this chapter,

Book Review: Documenting the Undocumented

Pursuing the American Dream (2009) as well as interviews the author conducted with undocumented students.

The book manages to provide an overview of writings that are most representative of the post-Operation Gatekeeper era, hence making a powerful statement about the disastrous repercussions of recent enforcements and the resulting humanitarian crises. This is done through “stories told both by and about so-called illegal aliens – the term itself designating this population as not fitting into the narratively constructed boundaries of the American ‘nation,’” as Caminero-Santangelo puts it (9). It is, in fact, the issue of “illegality” that ties different parts of the book together through questioning the automatic association of undocumented immigrants with breaking the law and threatening national security while giving those immigrants the voice they are robbed of by virtue of being “illegal,” hence challenging mainstream narratives about immigration. It also highlights a major shift in literature written by Americans of Mexican origins, where the “undocumented experience” is fully embraced as an integral part of Chicano/a identity, which could explain why the author chose to include literary, journalistic, and testimonial texts in the same book and present them all as different channels of advocacy through which undocumented immigration is analyzed by and on behalf of immigrants.

Documenting the Undocumented creates what Nancy Fraser calls “subaltern counterpublics,” in which groups that are not allowed to speak for themselves acquire a voice to subvert hegemonic narratives. In a context where citizenship or “legal” status becomes a prerequisite for participation in the public sphere, the stories of undocumented immigrants are always suppressed, overlooked, or challenged. Through bringing those stories to the light, Caminero-Santangelo examines the complexity of the border crossing process to challenge the simplistic rhetoric adopted by the mainstream not only through underlining the impact of this process on immigrants and their communities, but also by looking into the role of globalization and neoliberal policies in initiating such a crisis in the first place. This explains the inclusion of the phrase “social justice” in the title of the book, which is introduced by the author as a form of activism on the part of writers, journalists, and immigrants whose texts the book tackles and the author herself as well as a call for “ethical engagement and social action” (15) on the part of the readers. That is why Caminero-Santangelo notes that one of the three focal point on which her analysis of the stories of undocumented immigrants relies is “ethics” in the sense that endowing immigrants with agency through these stories becomes an ethical obligation and so does making those stories the first step towards effecting a real change on the ground.
The other two points Caminero-Santangelo’s focuses on in her analysis are trauma and testimony. She examines how the stories presented in the book, fictional and nonfictional, underline not only the individual trauma of crossing, deportation, and raids, but more importantly the collective trauma of communities whose members die, disappear, are raped, killed for their organs, or separated from their families. The narratives included in the book, in fact, demonstrate that immigration constitutes the collective trauma of entire communities on both sides of the border. They also link the trauma of border crossing to other traumas in Latin American collective memory, especially disappearance. Testimony, through which trauma is narrated, is also an integral part of the Latin American experience. Texts featured in the book invoke the “testimonio” genre not only to document the trauma, but also to empower the victims. In this regard, Caminero-Santangelo stresses that “testimonios” do not only aim at bearing witness to a traumatic event, but also act as instigators of a process of change. The combination of trauma and testimony, that is writing testimonies about traumas, is expected to trigger the afore-mentioned ethical stand that, the author argues, is the anticipated reaction to the counter-narratives included in the book.

Sonia Farid*

* Associate Professor in the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University.
Cairo Studies in English 2020(2): https://cse.journals.ekb.eg/