

AFRICAN MIGRATION NARRATIVES

Politics, Race, and Space

EDITED BY CAJETAN IHEKA AND JACK TAYLOR



African Migration Narratives



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Cajetan Iheka and Jack Taylor

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Introduction

The Migration Turn in African Cultural Productions

Cajetan Iheka and Jack Taylor

On September 2, 2000, the Pulitzer Prize-winning Spanish photojournalist Javier Bauluz received a phone call informing him of a drowned African immigrant on the beach at Zahara. When he took this call, Bauluz was in the nearby Andalusian town of Tarifa interviewing and taking photographs of another group of African immigrants who made it to Spain in poorly equipped dinghies. On arrival in Zahara, Bauluz took a photograph of the drowned man, capturing in the background pleasure-seekers who appear unperturbed by the dead body near them.¹ These African immigrants, who adopt unorthodox means of escaping the continent, do so to flee hunger, diseases, poverty, and wars, among other social quandaries. Simon Gikandi discusses another case: that of two Guinean boys found dead in the cargo hold of a plane in Brussels in the summer of 1998. The incident itself is heart wrenching as it speaks to the boys' desperation for survival and self-making; yet the boys—dead on arrival in Europe—chose not to remain silent. A letter from the boys to the people of Europe, found among their remains, underscores the socio-material conditions that have enabled the development of what, in this book, we term the migration turn in African cultural productions.²

The boys' letter is a moving text, perhaps a short, short story that stirs our emotions even as it draws attention to the socioeconomic issues affecting the continent. The letter, which utters the words that the drowned man in Bauluz's image cannot articulate, shows the boys pleading with European leaders to help Africa while simultaneously noting the problems afflicting the continent: "We call upon your graciousness and solidarity to help us in Africa. Our problems are many: war, sickness, hunger, lack of education. . . . And if you find that we have sacrificed our lives, it is because we suffer too much in Africa."³ The letter, in fact, underscores the issues animating this book: the social problems that circumscribe the possibility of dwelling for many on the continent, their disconnection from the gains of globalization even as they endure its

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most negative consequences, and the ways that cultural productions highlight and address the discontents of globalization on display in these cases.

African Migration Narratives brings together scholars in the field of African and African diaspora studies to address an important theme in African literature, film, and visual culture—the theme of migration. While a great deal of African diaspora scholarship has stressed the importance of the Atlantic slave trade in the creation of the “old diaspora,” recent scholarship is beginning to pay attention to the “new diaspora” by focusing on the new wave of African migration currently taking place. The new diaspora emphasizes the push and pull factors of migration for a new generation of Africans born in postcolonial Africa and their children born outside the continent or somewhere other than their place of national origin on the continent. The issue of migration is a political and social force that has begun to exert pressure on the form and content of contemporary African aesthetics, leading us to ask in this collection: How do African cultural productions represent migration? What contributions do they make to understanding globalization? How does one’s racial subjectivity and national identity shift by virtue of occupying a new space? What is the role of the state in the transnational trajectory that these narratives evince?

The migration turn, which can be roughly traced to the beginning of the new millennium, has seen a proliferation of literary texts and films (many of which are discussed in the chapters that follow), but also other artistic expressions dedicated to the theme. In the realm of African literature there is what Kenneth W. Harrow—a contributor to this collection—calls a “paradigm shift” that results in periodic changes in the form and content of this body of literature.⁴

It can be argued that there is nothing new or exceptional about migration as a theme in African cultural productions, since many literary texts and films have been devoted to this theme at least since the 1960s. Buchi Emecheta’s *Second-Class Citizen*, for instance, illustrates that the theme of migration is anything but a recent phenomenon in African literature.⁵ Yet a closer look suggests that never has this theme been as prominent as it is in contemporary cultural artifacts. When Buchi Emecheta’s novel appeared in the early 1970s, the dominant thematic issue of African literature was the figuration of the nation, newly independent nations, or those struggling to emerge from the colonial doldrums. Narratives such as Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease* depict returning Africans who, having been educated in Europe, are coming home to contribute to nation building.⁶ This is what Madhu Krishnan, in her chapter in this volume, terms “temporary migration to the imperial metropole, usually undertaken under the auspices of colonial education.” Krishnan explains that temporary migration “was commonly used to register the tension between competing visions of so-called modernity and tradition.” In film, works such as Ousmane Sembène’s *Xala* represent the impotence of the postindependence national elite. Even when his *Mandabi* chronicles the frustration of cashing a money order sent by a relative abroad, the emphasis is on the failures of post-coloniality and less on the migrant or expatriated native.

All considered, one can detect a shift from those early works focused on the nation to the outward, transnational emphasis of recent migration texts, including those discussed in the chapters to come. These texts fit Rebecca Walkowitz's description of immigrant fictions that are attentive to "political histories that exceed the nation," while "recognizing those that are narrower than the nation, or those that emphasize alternative grounds of [transnational] collectivity."⁷ If earlier African literary texts, as Krishnan suggests, uphold the duality of tradition/modernity and celebrate a distinct Africanness separable from the West, the recent textual inscriptions on migration foreground instabilities and the kind of contamination that intercultural contacts make possible.

No doubt, the transformation being sketched here raises a pertinent question as to its genesis. To begin to address this question is first of all to recognize African cultural artifacts as being informed by their social context. Anticolonial narratives, such as the novels of Chinua Achebe and the films of Sembène Ousmane, were deployed as cultural tools of resistance against colonialism.⁸ Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is celebrated for depicting the strengths and shortcomings of traditional Igbo society against the colonial charge that Africans had no culture or history before the arrival of the Europeans with their mission to civilize barbaric natives. Achebe's careful and consistent depiction of a society moored in cultural values (however flawed) undercuts the Eurocentric idea of ahistorical Africa and paved the way for other anticolonial texts, including Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure*, which portrays the collision of colonial values with Islam and indigenous practices.⁹

The 1960s and 1970s also witnessed the popularity of another form of literature, invested in emergent African states and postindependence disillusionment. Again we can trace a parallel development between the wave of independence that swept the continent beginning with Ghana in 1957, Nigeria in 1960, Kenya in 1963, and so on, and the emergence of the so-called literature of postcolonial disillusionment. African countries rode to independence on a strong wave of optimism for change and the ascendancy of self-rule. It was assumed that these new nations could now achieve their potential with the departure of the Europeans. But as history has shown, the promise of independence was dashed with the corruption that plagued the new order. The military seized power in many countries and others suffered from civil wars within years of independence. The literature of this period, including Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*, Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, and Ama Aita Aidoo's *No Sweetness Here and Other Stories*, laments the broken promise of independence and the crumbling of the social order even before these nations were on their feet.¹⁰ Some texts written in this period also feature temporary migrants who go to study in Europe and America, with the hope of returning to their country afterward, or those who have returned to the corruption at home after spending years abroad.

The problems facing African countries were exacerbated by structural adjustment programs in the 1980s. Since corruption impeded national development in many of these emerging nations, it meant that the leaders often

had to borrow to fund capital projects, pay salaries, and distribute political patronage. As condition for the loans, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank pressured African governments to disinvest in social services, devalue their currency, and shrink the provision of public services. The privatization at the heart of the IMF-imposed deregulation practices further impoverished the masses already reeling from the thievery of kleptomaniac states as well as the sociopolitical and economic instabilities resulting from misrule.

Taken together, these challenges laid the groundwork for the mistrust of the nation and the transnational turn characterizing contemporary cultural works concerned with Africa. Valérie Orlando's claim that "emerging from a literature of commitment (*la littérature de combat*) written in French, [Francophone African] authors in the new millennium extend their themes beyond the boundaries of cultural and national specificity, embracing a more cosmopolitan transnational spirit" is indeed applicable to the cultural productions written in English as well.¹¹ If in the era of decolonization, the nation was considered primal to independence, freedom, and progress, with the failure of the national experiment from Algeria to Angola, it became clear that the solution was not to be found in the nation or its elites. Transnational alliances and solidarities became paramount following the civil wars and other crises that gripped the continent in the 1990s (military dictatorship in Nigeria, wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, the Rwanda genocide, just to mention some). For example, Ken Saro-Wiwa, the environmental activist hanged by General Abacha's government in 1995 for his activism against the oppression of the oil-producing Ogoni community in Nigeria (see Pressley-Sanon's chapter in this book), found inspiration and support in the West for his protests against ecological devastation. Similarly, many war refugees and political exiles from Africa found a home in Europe and America around this time. A number of these exiles and refugees wrote accounts of their experiences as both fictional and nonfictional narratives.¹²

This transnationalism was also bolstered by globalization forces, which became more pronounced with the liberalization of trade, especially since the 1990s. Africa became more connected to the rest of the world through trade, particularly the goods imported to replace the products of the now comatose manufacturing sector on the continent. At this juncture, Africa's exports were primarily raw materials (crude oil, cocoa, and so on), which were then resold to the continent at exorbitant costs after being processed into finished goods abroad. The accelerated availability of media technologies—phones, cable television, and the internet among them, also bolstered Africa's connection to the world.

In a telling contradiction, even as trade and goods moved freely in the new global order, Africans were facing more restricted travel. Visa measures became very stringent as "western nations have largely created insurmountable physical and financial barriers to the poor and disenfranchised."¹³ For many Africans who belong to the poor and disenfranchised category, it became necessary to turn to dangerous routes, including traveling through

the desert and trying to cross into Europe from North Africa, as depicted in Orlando's chapter in the collection. For those who could not access Europe, the American visa lottery, which Matthew Brown writes about in his contribution to this volume, appeared as an option for accessing what he calls "random invitation" to explore the American dream. While many tragically drown on their way out of the continent, things do not seem to fare very well for those who make it abroad. From feelings of alienation in their new environment to enduring racism, to very limited economic opportunities, these African migrants come to learn that, like the failed promises of independence in their respective nations, the immigrant dream is no more than a dream deferred. As Isidore Diala's chapter on the Nigerian playwright Esiaba Irobi makes clear, this pathetic condition appears the same regardless of location—be it in Europe or the United States.

The foregoing historical trajectory locates the background for the flourishing of the migration text since the 2000s. As we have seen, the failures of the nation-state as well as the forces of globalization that opened the continent to the world, albeit conditionally, provided the context for the proliferation of this genre. The genre also got a boost with the September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States. For the first time since Pearl Harbor, the United States faced an attack that undercut the idea of national security and set off a series of wars that had ramifications for global affairs. As Judith Butler has rightly postulated, the United States responded to its vulnerability with heightened violence, which in turn made populations across the world more vulnerable.¹⁴ The migrant also came under attack from further policed borders, and the rise of xenophobic attacks targeted at people of color and those of Islamic faith in many Western countries. Even as the African nation-state declined, it is clear that the nation-state is anything but obsolete. As Eileen Julien puts it, "states still possess the means to enforce their will," including the will to police borders and bodies in their territorial jurisdiction.¹⁵

The cultural productions that have thrived since the aforementioned developments testify to Akin Adesokan's point that genre is primarily determined by context and is a product of "a vast range of political, social, economic, and aesthetic factors and meanings."¹⁶ With the expatriation of many Africans, including writers, filmmakers, and scholars to Europe and the United States following the crises of postcoloniality, it makes sense that the cultural texts that have flourished since the 2000s are predominantly devoted to migration. In an essay published in *World Literature Today* in 2008, Tanure Ojaide, himself a writer who immigrated to the United States from Nigeria, asserts that "migration, globalization, and the related phenomena of exile, transnationality, and multilocality have their bearing on the cultural identity, aesthetics, content, and form of the literary production of Africans abroad."¹⁷

Despite the complexities and divergences in the works of these artists, we can outline some features of the migration narrative, including: the portrayal of the debilitating conditions that propel migrants to leave the continent, the experiences of migrants abroad, their relationship to the homeland, and the

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negotiation of a possible return, be it physical or psychological. The longing or yearning for return is often connected to migrants' exclusion or limited access to the social and economic resources of their new environment. According to Brenda Cooper's analysis of the works of the new generation of African migrant writers, "exclusion is what migrant writers often depict when their protagonists find themselves perplexed in strange, hostile climates and settings, where they do not get the joke, understand the irony, the pun or the analogy and where their accented English and their dress, food and manners, are not quite right."¹⁸

To be sure, the precarious condition of the African migrant in these narratives complicates the privileged Afropolitan subjectivity that Taiye Selasi celebrates in her descriptive article on the elite, immigrant, mobile African subject who is comfortable in New York and Nairobi, as well as in Los Angeles and Lagos. In her well-known essay, "Bye-Bye Babar," Selasi has this to say about the Afropolitan: "There is at least one place on The African Continent to which we tie our sense of self: be it a nation-state (Ethiopia), a city (Ibadan), or an auntie's kitchen. Then there's the G8 city or two (or three) that we know like the backs of our hands, and the various institutions that know us for our famed focus. We are Afropolitans: not citizens, but Africans of the world."¹⁹ Clearly, Selasi's Africans of the world enjoy a certain privilege that most Africans do not boast of; it is no wonder her Afropolitanism has been critiqued for its exuberant materialism.²⁰

In Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*, and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, as well as in many of the narratives under study here, the characters' experiences contradict the optimism encapsulated in Selasi's vision. As a brief excursus into *Americanah* and Bulawayo's novel demonstrates, the characteristics we have outlined seem closer to the lived experience of the characters of migration narratives than Selasi's description of the Afropolitan. Adichie's *Americanah* depicts the experiences of a young Nigerian lady, Ifemelu, who travels to the United States for university education, but with the intention to settle there. The early part of the novel chronicles Ifemelu's experience in Nigeria, where university lecturers go on strike because of unpaid salaries and the absence of infrastructure crucial for intellectual labor; where unemployment and nepotism thrive; and where society is sharply divided along ethnic terms since the cessation of the Nigeria-Biafra war forty years earlier. Ifemelu's departure from Nigeria, on a student visa, is precipitated by that of her aunt, who had left Nigeria after the death of her sugar daddy, a top military officer who is implicated in the corruption endemic to the country. Ifemelu's departure is also followed by her boyfriend's departure. Obinze travels to London on a six-month visa after unsuccessful attempts to secure an American visa. As Ifemelu and Obinze struggle to survive in their new environments, we see a pattern: they cannot work legally in their new environments as they are not citizens or permanent residents. When they get employed, it is as menial laborers: Obinze cleans toilets and Ifemelu babysits and, in one shame-inducing instance, compelled by privation, performs a sexual favor in exchange for cash. Although the improvement in Ifemelu's

fortunes after her college graduation seems to bring her closer to the Afropolitan Selasi describes, her ability to secure a decent job and travel freely is contingent on her relationship with Curt, a wealthy white man. Ifemelu's visa status prevents her from enjoying the American dream until her white savior steps in, a disturbing fact that haunts their relationship. Moreover, Adichie's protagonist is equally affected by the racial tensions separating her from the real Americans, white (Curt) and black (Blaine). Ultimately, she decides to return to Nigeria to the consternation of her family, who wonder why she would give up her good life. Although Obinze does not return voluntarily, he finds himself in Lagos after he is deported for overstaying his visa on the eve of a fake marriage arranged for immigration benefits.

Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, similarly, explores the process of travel, the experience in the United States, and the longing for home that are features of Adichie's text. The early section of the novel shows the protagonist, Darling, and her friends as they navigate the streets of Zimbabwe in their playful hunts. Their torn clothes, hunger, and decrepit housing reveal their social standing as part of the Zimbabwean poor whose economic status is not ameliorated by independence and the dismantling of white rule in Southern Rhodesia. Ultimately, the protagonist receives an invitation from a relative to relocate to "Destroyedmichygen." Like Ifemelu and Obinze, she also leaves with a temporary nonimmigrant visa, in her case to Detroit, Michigan, but this sojourn to God's own country will be anything but temporary and far from glamorous. If the temporary migrants of early African literature proceed with the intention to return at the completion of their studies overseas, the migrants of contemporary fiction leave the continent to settle abroad despite the nonimmigrant status of their visa. As Darling adjusts to a more improved condition in the United States, we are shown other immigrant challenges: her uncle Kojo, a Ghanaian, is alienated and shows excitement only when speaking his mother tongue on the phone with his compatriots. As in *Americanah*, many of the African migrants in Bulawayo's novel do menial jobs, like working at a nursing home. Toward the end of the novel, we can detect a longing for home, but as Darling puts it, "Aunt Fostalina cannot go back, none of us can."²¹ Having overstayed their visas, to leave the country becomes tantamount to losing the chance to return.

If Obinze and Ifemelu end up in Nigeria at the end of *Americanah*, Darling's return is akin to what Toni Pressley-Sanon describes as a "migration of the heart" in her reading of Noo Saro-Wiwa's *Looking for Transwonderland* in her chapter here. By this term, Pressley-Sanon points to a psychological form of migration, an endearment to a place even if one does not physically move there. At the beginning of Noo's travel narrative, Nigeria is a corrupt place associated with the execution of her father Ken Saro-Wiwa; in Pressley-Sanon's reading Noo undergoes a change, embracing the country even if she admits its challenges by the end of the text. In the case of Bulawayo's protagonist, even if she does not physically travel to Zimbabwe, she is emotionally connected to this space by the time the novel ends.

Noo Saro-Wiwa's travelogue also exemplifies a corollary of the migration narrative, insofar as it can be read as a narrative of return. If Bulawayo's novel focuses primarily on the actual departure from the continent, the events that precede the act of immigration, and the experience in the new location, Saro-Wiwa's writing, like the other narratives of return examined here (including Teju Cole's *Every Day Is for the Thief* discussed in Connor Ryan's chapter), stresses the experience of characters who return to the homeland from their Western location. Unlike in Adichie's *Americanah* where the return seems final, many of the narratives that belong here depict temporary visits for a variety of reasons. In Saro-Wiwa's case, it is to reacquaint herself with Nigeria and research her book; for Cole's protagonist in *Everyday*, the visit is primarily to reconnect with family, while the more sinister Ike in Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc.* visits his natal Utonki in Eastern Nigeria to steal a god he could sell to an elite art gallery back in New York. Since his foreignness and immigrant status obstruct Ike's efforts to tap into the American dream, he decides to commodify the exotic god of his Igbo community. These texts provide a counterpoint to the idea of migration as a one-way journey out of Africa by the multiple trajectories they make possible.

We acknowledge there are exceptions to the norms articulated here such as in the films analyzed in Orlando's chapter where the immigrants' quest for Europe is punctuated at immigration detention centers where they await deportation back to the continent. The experience of these characters forecloses the opportunity to strive for a better life in Europe. Yet there seems to be a convergence around some or all of the features discussed above in many of the texts that constitute the migration genre. While it is impossible to examine all literary and visual texts belonging to this category, most of the contributors to the volume focus their chapters on recent literary and filmic texts that have not received considerable attention. The much older forced migration as a result of the slave trade is also represented in its afterlives in the literary imagination of Lusophone Africa (see Afolabi's chapter), and the visual culture of a diasporic community in Peru (see Shang's chapter).

The inclusion of recent works that are yet to receive considerable critical attention, the broad array of texts assembled here, as well as its geographical diversity, all distinguish this book from other studies that have treated the theme of migration in Africa's cultural productions. Dan Ojwang's *Reading Migration and Culture: The World of East African Indian Literature*, for instance, offers a compelling analysis of East African literary narratives that deal with Indian migration.²² Ojwang's insightful discussion covers topics such as alienation, exile, loss of familial and cultural connections, and the politics of navigating a different racial politics, but its explorations are limited to literary texts and the Indian diaspora in East Africa. Hakim Abderrezak's *Ex-Centric Migrations: Europe and the Maghreb in Mediterranean Cinema, Literature, and Music* extends its focus to other cultural productions, but its restriction to the Maghreb omits a significant chunk of Africa in the same way that the scope of Mahriana Rofheart's *Shifting Perceptions of Migration in Senegalese Literature*,

Film, and Social Media makes clear the need for studies attentive to the currents of migration narratives across the continent.²³ Jennifer Wawrzinek and J. K. S. Makokha's edited collection, *Negotiating Afropolitanism: Essays on Borders and Spaces in Contemporary African Literature and Folklore*, is the text closest to this one.²⁴ Our collection is different, however, in that it braids together different language groups and geographical regions by being attentive to Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone areas. This collection engages a multiplicity of migratory routes (and regions) such as North Africa, South Africa, and West Africa, to Europe, Asia, and South America. Its encapsulation of a range of media—novels, memoirs, film, and other forms of visual cultural productions—also extends the angle of vision of existing studies.

African Migration Narratives starts on a dark note. In a CNN report in October 2016, Richard Allen Greene reported that more migrants will have died attempting to cross the Mediterranean in 2016 than any other year. Greene noted that at least thirty-eight hundred people had already died attempting to cross the Mediterranean in addition to observing that one in eighty-eight people will get stranded at sea, and in all likelihood will be left to die, never making it to Italy, Greece, or Spain. Those making the trip come from many countries in Africa from Nigeria in the West to Eritrea in the East.²⁵ The year 2017 wasn't much better for those seeking refuge abroad. The International Organization for Migration released a report on September 22, 2017, noting that 133,640 entered Europe by sea and 2,556 migrants died attempting to make their way to Europe.²⁶

These tragedies are now being represented on the silver screen. Jonas Carpignano's 2015 *Mediterranea* immediately comes to mind, as does Moussa Touré's *La Pirogue*, as does Geradad Olivares's 2007 *14 Kilometers. Méditerranée* charts the brutal journey of two friends as they flee from Burkina Faso on foot to make their way to the shores of Libya to take a boat to Calabria, a small town in Southern Italy, where they pick fruits. Touré's *La Pirogue* charts the journey of Senegalese immigrants as they make the brutal journey from Senegal to Spain whereas Olivares's *14 Kilometers* charts migrant travels from Niger through the Tenere and Sahara to the edges of Morocco.

The chapters comprising this book are in four parts. Valérie Orlando begins part 1, "African Migration on the Screen: Films of Migration." Orlando's chapter engages with how illegal immigration across the Mediterranean has been represented in film. Focusing on North Africa, Orlando anchors her chapter in two Algerian films: *Harragas (The Burners)*, a 2010 film directed by Merzak Allouache, and Mostéfa Djadam's 2002 *Frontières*. The films function as testaments to the social and political conditions driving migrants to make such a dangerous journey. Throughout her chapter Orlando brings in Deleuze and Guattari's notion of deterritorialization and the rhizome as well as Heidegger's existential phenomenology so as to demonstrate how global capitalism is responsible for, and exploits, the migration crisis. In the process, Orlando demonstrates that the "positive subjecthood" some postcolonial critics celebrate is not applicable to the immigrants in these films who cannot penetrate the networks of global capitalism.

Matthew Brown's "Nollywood Comedies and Visa Lotteries: Welfare States, Borders, and Migration as Random Invitation" continues in a similar vein as Valerie Orlando's chapter. Like Orlando, Brown is concerned with the push and pull factors that stimulate migration. His investigation puts pressure on the relationship between Western liberal welfare states, migration, and migration policy. Brown's chapter expands the range of geographical space covered in this collection by shifting the reader's attention to the cultural productions emerging out of Nigeria's Nollywood. He examines four Nollywood comedies—*Osuofia in London*, *American Visa*, *30 Days in Atlanta*, and *Visa Lottery*—to analyze how these films put a comedic spin on the United States' visa lottery program. Brown argues that *Osuofia in London* and *30 Days in Atlanta* present the Nigerian migrant as an object of both desire and dejection, while *American Visa* and *Visa Lottery* showcase the visa lottery program as indicative of a corrupt global economy.

In "Accented Cinema: Chineze Anyaene's *Ije: The Journey*," Babatunde Onikoyi stays with Nollywood films like Brown in the previous chapter by offering a close reading of Chineze Anyaene's *Ije: The Journey*. Onikoyi reads the film in light of Hamid Naficy's notion of "accented cinema" to delineate how exile, migration, and cultural hybridity are represented within this popular film. The author also locates Anyaene's *Ije: The Journey* within the borders of New Nollywood, a genre that consists of directors beginning to make high-budget and sophisticated films for an audience living in Nigeria and abroad who are interested in more quality films.

Daniela Ricci's "Migrations and Representations: The Cinema of Griot Dani Kouyaté" continues the movement of the book from Nigeria to Burkina Faso. Whereas the previous two chapters are concerned with Nollywood, this chapter presents a close-up of Dani Kouyaté's work. Ricci digs deep into Kouyaté's corpus of film by focusing on his 1995 *Keïta! l'héritage du griot* (Keïta! The heritage of the griot), his 2001 *Sia, le rêve du python* (Sia, the dream of the python), his 2008 documentary *Souvenirs encombrants d'une femme de ménage* (Burdening memories of a cleaning lady), and his latest 2016 *Medan Vi Lever* (While we live). Through an engagement with these films she argues that migration restructures one's subjectivity and determines the form and content of films that immigrant filmmakers like Kouyaté produce. Ricci contends that Kouyaté's films show evidence of indigenous traditions and hybridization as a result of contact with Western culture.

If the migration routes represented in the films in part 1 follow familiar migration patterns and passages to Europe and North America, part 2, "The Forgotten Diasporas," presents the reader with underanalyzed and underrepresented sites of the black diaspora. Niyi Afolabi's "Mamiwata, Migrations, and Miscegenation: Transculturalism in Mia Couto, José Agualusa, and Germano Almeida" begins part 2. The chapter analyzes texts from areas that experienced colonialism under the yoke of Portuguese rule: Angola, Mozambique, and Cape Verde. Afolabi centers on José Agualusa's *Nação Crioula* (Creole nation), Mia Couto's *O Outro Pé da Sereia* (The other foot of the mermaid),

and Germano Almeida's *O Testamento do Senhor Napumoceno* (The last will of Napumoceno). Taken together the three texts move the reader across Africa, Europe, and South America to investigate the legacy of slavery and colonialism: the hybridity, shifting identities, and negotiation of power relations resulting from forced migration.

S. Shankar's "Poor Migrant: Poverty and Striving in Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* and *The Pickup*" expands the range of the collection through a consideration of the white South African writer's *July's People* and *The Pickup*. The chapter tracks an overlooked migratory route as Abu in *The Pickup* migrates to South Africa from the Middle East, only to be deported and forced to move back to the Middle East following the fall of apartheid in South Africa. Thus the novel highlights a migratory path *to* and *from* Africa. Through an engagement with the novels, Shankar provides a political economy of migration, showing that poverty is a stimulus for displacement. As Shankar puts it, "In Gordimer's novels, the striving poor, driven by necessity and by dreams of a better life, migrate but in ways that complicate easy notions of migration." The chapter draws on a wide range of theoretical scholarship from Karl Marx, Mahmood Mamdani, and Franco Barchiesi to elucidate the figure of the poor migrant in the context of postcolonial and postapartheid South Africa.

Gilbert Ndi Shang's "Reimaging Blackness in a Hybridized and Racialized Space: The Visual Landscapes of the Peruvian District of El Carmen, Chincha" takes the reader on a journey to Peru. The author draws on a fresh methodological focus by importing language from visual cultural studies to engage representations of blackness in the iconography present in everyday life in El Carmen such as billboards and restaurant advertisements. Through rich close readings and a theoretical analysis of objects encountered in everyday life, Shang highlights the cultural hybridity present in Afro-Peruvian foodways and demonstrates how forced migration through slavery continues to shape cultural practices in Peru.

Part 3, "Migration Against the Grain: Narratives of Return," attempts to overcome a shortcoming in studies of the black diaspora. Much of the scholarship traces routes of migration from Third World spaces to the First World, thereby radically limiting our understanding of migratory flows. This part works against this lopsided analysis of migration and considers narratives of return as central to migratory flows. Madhu Krishnan's "Reading Space, Subjectivity, and Form in the Twenty-First-Century Narrative of Return" begins the part by addressing two narratives of return: Okey Ndibe's 2014 *Foreign Gods, Inc.* and Noo Saro-Wiwa's 2012 travel narrative *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria*. Krishnan challenges homogeneous notions of migration that solely trace migratory flows from the periphery to the imperial center so as to uncover how returning to one's native land engenders a radical shift in one's understanding of home and sense of self. Krishnan demonstrates how Ndibe's and Saro-Wiwa's texts share a skepticism for both celebratory Afropolitanism and cynical Afropessimism in that they neither celebrate living in the diaspora nor are firmly pessimistic about Africa's future. Both narratives, in Krishnan's

reading, use mobility to address uneven political, social, and economic conditions that disclose the ontological condition of dis-alienation, which opens the self to new ethical modes of understanding.

Like Krishnan's chapter, Toni Pressley-Sanon's "*Looking for Transwonderland: Noo Saro-Wiwa's Migration of the Heart*" also engages Noo Saro-Wiwa's travel narrative. Whereas Krishnan placed the narrative next to *Foreign Gods Inc.* to investigate how mobility exposes uneven political, social, and economic conditions, Pressley-Sanon reads *Looking for Transwonderland* as a work of mourning representing the author's attempt at working through the trauma of the murder of her father, the environmental activist Ken Saro-Wiwa. But the narrative is more than a work of mourning as it also functions as the author's attempt to understand her relationship to a homeland she hasn't visited since 2005, when she went to bury her father's bones. Pressley-Sanon's chapter assists us in understanding how migration has shifted Noo's identity, ethnic subjectivity, national identity, and her relationship with her homeland. Pressley-Sanon develops what she calls "migration of the heart," which emphasizes the affective and emotional dimensions of migration.

Connor Ryan, in "The Literary Circulation of Teju Cole's *Every Day Is for the Thief*," poses a question: "What are we reading when we read African writing today?" The question is posed in response to how publishers market Cole's *Every Day*, a narrative first published in Nigeria and later republished in the United States and the United Kingdom after the author attained global fame with his *Open City*. Ryan's chapter examines the changes made to Cole's book (including its cover) in relation to where and to what audience the book is being marketed. In this way, Ryan traces the migratory flow of the text itself and uncovers how economic forces shape narratives in a global literary marketplace. Ryan's analysis also moves beyond a discussion of how *Every Day Is for the Thief* migrates to different literary markets to interrogate the form of the novel and Cole's reflections on his return to his native land.

MaryEllen (Ellie) Higgins's "Speculative Migration and the Project of Futurity in Sylvestre Amoussou's *Africa Paradis*" ends part 3. Higgins braids a wide range of theorists together from Frantz Fanon, to Judith Butler, and Homi Bhabha to analyze *Africa Paradis* as a project of futurity. The film imagines a future where the migration pattern has been reversed: white Europeans are fleeing their countries to a United Africa in search of better living conditions only to face discrimination mirroring what African migrants face throughout Europe and beyond. By engaging in a project of futurity, Amoussou's film invites the spectator to imagine alternative forms of subjectivity to reveal our shared humanity, forcing Europeans in the process to imagine themselves as immigrants facing right-wing backlash.

Part 4, "Migration and Difference: Indigeneity, Race, Religion, and Poetry at the Margins," consist of four chapters covering a wide range of topics and source material. What ties these chapters together is a shared concern with the interconnection of identity, politics, and migration. Kenneth W. Harrow's "Monkeys from Hell, *Toubabs* in Africa" begins the part with an engagement

with the work of the Senegalese writer Boubacar Boris Diop. The chapter focuses primarily on his *Doomi Golo*, which has recently been translated into English from Wolof. Harrow's reading concentrates on how the politics of belonging, home, and identity shift as a result of migration and the conditions of the immigrant who has left home. He demonstrates how the other is necessary for the construction of indigenous identity in both Africa and in Europe, while showing the manner in which claims of autochthony are shaped by migration, economics, and politics.

If Harrow is concerned with the intersection of migration, indigenous identity, and politics in Diop's *Doomi Golo*, Andrew H. Armstrong, in "Mapping 'Sacred' Space in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* and *Minaret*," turns to the work of Sudanese writer Leila Aboulela to tease out the connection between religious faith, space, and migration. What Armstrong locates is how Aboulela's fiction maps "sacred space" and how the protagonist's religious identity is often a point of contention due to the religious intolerance in many Western countries. In his reading of *The Translator* and *Minaret*, Armstrong demonstrates how Aboulela imagines faith as both a lived experience and a conceptual category, and a means by which the feelings of dislocation and displacement can be overcome.

John C. Hawley continues the thematic concerns presented by Armstrong. While Armstrong's chapter discusses how Islamic faith functions as a means to safeguard migrants from despair and isolation engendered by migration, Hawley, in "Waris Dirie, FGM, and the Authentic Voice," turns to another author from the Islamic world to reflect on the cultural practice of female circumcision. Through a close reading of her autobiographies *Desert Flower* and *Desert Dawn*, as well as *Desert Children*, a text documenting her activist work to combat female circumcision, Hawley charts the author's journey from Somalia to Europe. Taken together, the three texts document Dirie's migration from a family of Somali nomads to Europe, where she became a famous model and an outspoken advocate against female circumcision. In Hawley's reading, migration makes possible a form of female and celebrity agency that propels Dirie's work.

Next, Isidore Diala's "Esiaba Irobi: Poetry at the Margins" zooms in on Esiaba Irobi's poetry. In Irobi's poetry delivered in *Cotyledon*, *Inflorescence*, and *Why I Don't Like Philip Larkin and Other Poems*, Diala locates the poet himself and his experience living in exile, while searching for a home in Nigeria, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Through careful attention to his poetics with assistance from Edward Said's work on exile, Diala uncovers Irobi's documentation of metaphysical homelessness. In a fashion similar to Pressley-Sanon's, Diala uncovers some of the affective and emotional dimensions of migration and exile in his interpretation of Irobi's oeuvre.

African Migration Narratives was written and is presented to the world in a moment of crisis. Migrant bodies continue to suffer the political and social conditions described above and are increasingly used as political fodder. The rise of far-right groups in Europe that have successfully exploited the

immigration crisis for their own ends—such as the neofascist Golden Dawn in Greece, the National Front led by Marine Le Pen in France, and Alternative for Germany that successfully exploited the migration crisis for their own political ends, forces us to rethink our ethical commitments to immigrants who will suffer the consequences of the severe policies of these nationalist groups. Donald J. Trump’s continuous call to build a wall on the United States–Mexico border and to place a ban on Muslim immigrants to the United States outraged people on the left and was celebrated by many on the right. From the vantage point of ethics and politics, then, the world faces not a crisis in immigration, but a crisis in our capacity to offer hospitality, to welcome those in need. This historical era will largely be defined by whether or not we open our arms or turn our backs to some of the world’s most vulnerable people. This collection, in part, is an effort to nudge humanity toward justice—to encourage the reader to welcome in advance the ones who have yet to come.

Notes

1. Javier Bauluz, “The Story Behind a Picture,” <http://www.ha-ka.dk/kf/tarifa.htm>.
2. Simon Gikandi, “Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 100, no. 3 (2001): 630–31.
3. *Ibid.*, 630.
4. Kenneth Harrow, *Thresholds of Change in African Literature* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2004), 7.
5. Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen* (New York: G. Braziller, 1975).
6. Chinua Achebe, *No Longer at Ease* (New York: Anchor Books, 1960).
7. Rebecca L. Walkowitz, “The Location of Literature: The Transnational Book and the Migrant Writer,” *Contemporary Literature* 47, no. 4 (2006): 540.
8. For a discussion of Achebe’s significance for the development of modern African literature, see Abiola Irele, “Chinua Achebe at Seventy: Homage to Achebe,” *Research in African Literatures* 32, no. 3 (2001): 1–2.
9. Cheikh Hamidou Kane, *Ambiguous Adventure* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1972).
10. Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, *Petals of Blood* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977); Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1989); Ama Ata Aidoo, *No Sweetness Here and Other Stories* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1995).
11. Valérie Orlando, “The Transnational Turn in African Literature of French Expression: Imagining Other Utopic Spaces in the Globalized Age,” *Humanities* 5, no. 2 (2016): 2.
12. One instance is Ishmael Beah’s acclaimed memoir, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).
13. Frieda Ekotto and Kenneth W. Harrow, *Rethinking African Cultural Production* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 2.

14. See Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso Books, 2004).

15. Eileen Julien, "The Critical Present: Where Is 'African Literature'?" in *Rethinking African Cultural Production*, ed. Frieda Ekotto and Kenneth W. Harrow (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 24.

16. Akin Adesokan, *Postcolonial Artists and Global Aesthetics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), xiii.

17. Tanure Ojaide, "Migration, Globalization, and Recent African Literature," *World*

Literature Today 82, no. 2 (2008): 43.

18. Brenda Cooper, *A New Generation of African Writers: Migration, Material Culture and Language* (Woodbridge, UK: James Currey, 2008), 4.

19. Taiye Selasi, "Bye-Bye Barbar," *LIP Magazine*, March 3, 2005, <http://www/thelip.robertsharp.co.uk/?p=76>.

20. For a discussion of its critique, see Chielozona Eze, "Rethinking African Culture and Identity: The Afropolitan Model," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 26, no. 2 (2014): 234–47. Eze, however, insists that the limitations of Selasi's formulation should not undermine its condition of possibility for registering a nonessentialist conception of Africanness rooted in relationality (240). Achille Mbembe shares Eze's optimistic redemption of Afropolitanism as shorthand for complex and multiple ways of being in the world. See Sarah Balakrishnan and Achille Mbembe, "Pan-African Legacies, Afropolitan Futures," *Transition* 120 (2016): 28–37.

21. NoViolet Bulawayo, *We Need New Names* (New York: Reagan Arthur Books, 2013), 290.

22. Dan Ojwang, *Reading Migration and Culture: The World of East African Indian Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

23. Hakim Abderrezak, *Ex-Centric Migrations: Europe and the Maghreb in Mediterranean Cinema, Literature, and Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016); Mahriana Rofheart, *Shifting Perceptions of Migration in Senegalese Literature, Film, and Social Media* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014).

24. Jennifer Wawrzinek and J. K. S. Makokha, *Negotiating Afropolitanism: Essays on Borders and Spaces in Contemporary African Literature and Folklore* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

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26. International Organization for Migration, "Mediterranean Migrant Arrivals Reach 133,640; 2,556 Deaths in 2017," <https://reliefweb.int/report/italy/mediterranean-migrant-arrivals-reach-133640-2556-deaths-2017>.

Part One

African Migration on the Screen

Films of Migration

Harragas, Global Subjects, and Failed Deterritorializations

The Tragedies of Illegal Mediterranean Crossings in Maghrebi Cinema

Valérie K. Orlando

Whether seeking refuge from political turmoil or economic calamity, immigrants who are forced to embark on hazardous journeys across the Mediterranean Sea often end up dead. For example, the fourteen-mile stretch of sea separating Tangiers, Morocco, from the southern tip of Spain (a pathway of choice for those seeking better socioeconomic and political situations in Europe) has, since the beginning of this century, become a quotidian deadly route. Migrants' bodies routinely wash up on Spanish shores or back on the beaches of the Maghreb (Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia).¹ The horrors of illegal crossings have been repeatedly evoked in written texts and films most noticeably since 2000, as the death toll has increased due to sociopolitical and economic unrest across Africa and the Middle East. In 2016, from Libya alone, more than twenty-one hundred people died trying to cross the sea to escape war. This number, juxtaposed to those officially published by Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, paints a picture of hopelessness. The *harragas*, as they are called in Arabic, are of all colors and religions, from the Maghreb and as far south as Senegal, Mali, and Mauritania. In his work, *Ex-Centric Migrations: Europe and the Maghreb in Mediterranean Cinema, Literature, and Music*, Hakim Abderrezak explores in depth the connotations of the term *harraga*. He explains that the noun *harragas* (plural), the subject of the works of many Maghrebi authors and filmmakers, is a dialectical Arabic deformation of the standard Arabic *hrig* and *harga*, which mean *burning*. Different transcriptions include: *lahrig*, *l'hrig*, *el hrig*, *h'rig*, *harq*, and *hrague*. Abderrezak writes, "*Hrig* covers the clandestine

migrant's 1.) burning desire to leave, 2.) burning of kilometers to the final destination, and 3.) burning identification papers in hopes to make repatriation more difficult for authorities." As Abderrezak further explains, leaving "one's country clandestinely and the desire to do so are often designated by the terms *hrig* and *harga*."² Indeed, a whole vocabulary associated with the harragas has made its way into the contemporary narratives of illegal migration taking place in the Mediterranean basin. Words such as *clandestins* (French), *clandestinos* (Spanish) as well as *pateras* (Spanish) and *barques* (French), both meaning small fishing boats used to transport the harragas, have all become common terminology used to describe illegal crossings of the Mediterranean Sea.³

Over twenty-five hundred people die in the sea every year, according to some estimates, yet these numbers vary depending on who is reporting and for what political reason.⁴ What is true is that these statistics are made up of men, women, and children. Millennial films about this contemporary catastrophe made by Maghrebi filmmakers include: *Harragas* (The burners; Merzak Allouache, Algeria, 2010), *Andalousie, mon amour* (Andalusia, my love; Mohamed Nadif, Morocco, 2012), *Rome plutôt que vous* (Rome rather than you; Tariq Teguia, Algeria, 2008), and *Frontières* (Borders; Mostéfa Djadam, Algeria, 2002).⁵ The themes of these cinematic works (and there are many more to add to this list) have also been mirrored in literature, primarily by Maghrebi writers of French expression. Novels such as *Cannibales* (Cannibals; Mahi Binebine, Morocco, 2001), *Les Clandestins* (The clandestines; Youssouf Elalamy, Morocco, 2001), *Les Harragas ou les barques de la mort* (Burners or boats of death; Mohamed Teriah, Morocco, 2002), *Partir* (Leave; Tahar Ben Jelloun, Morocco/France, 2006), and *Harragas* (Burners; Boualem Sansal, Algeria, 2005) all depict what is now a familiar story of the Mediterranean basin. Tunisian journalist Fawzi Mellah's *Clandestin en Méditerranée* (Illegal in the Mediterranean) contributes to this body of literary publications an undercover report based on his own illegal crossing in 2000. These texts, both cinematic and literary, all reflect the tragic sociocultural and political face of Mediterranean illegal migration. Whether literature or film, both mediums reveal to what extent these accounts are all very similar. The harragas embody the accumulation of years of failure—failed Maghrebi postcolonial nations that have been unable to guarantee their citizens employment and civil societies that work on their behalf, coupled with failed European political will to foster stability in the Mediterranean region. Europe's inability to devise positive and viable immigration policies to accommodate the overwhelming needs of refugees has only become graver in the twenty-first century. Whether novel or film, these texts first and foremost depict characters who want to exercise "the right to move freely across the White Sea of the Middle granted to them by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights."⁶

This chapter uses two films, Allouache's *Harragas* and Djadam's *Frontières*, as exemplars of the genre of cinematic work discussed above, to illustrate the depth and scope of illegal immigration across the Mediterranean occurring between the Maghreb and Southern Europe, most predominantly Spain and

France. These films demonstrate that in our era of globalization, numbers cannot be ignored, and that illegal immigration is very much tied to the world's geopolitical and economic systems in which we live. The Maghrebi harraga is not just Algerian, Moroccan, or Tunisian, fleeing socioeconomic or political turmoil at home; he or she is also a compromised subject, a victim of the larger, millennial global-capitalist systems of our times. Where "the globalized subject" in the Western European–Anglo-American sense has come to be viewed, certainly in the era of the internet and social media, as a primarily positive persona, construed through global exchanges and multicultural connections, when used to "signify the African," the term takes on another meaning.⁷ As scholar Freida Ekotto explains, the African "sujet global" is anything but positively understood in the contemporary "mondial" (worldly) climate. Globalization, when associated with the black African or Maghrebi body in these films, is almost always interpreted in terms of economic bondage. The harraga's flight elsewhere to find employment to sustain a family is often the only option. His or her economically defined departure beyond the borders of home make this migrant a victim bound in exploitation in order to fuel the powerful machines of globalized, capitalist First World–nation systems.⁸ I argue here that harraga films make us ponder the meaning of global free-circulation and its positive, multicultural connotations as articulated in the Western European–United States context. The Maghrebi clandestine traveler is implicated in a voyage within a network over which he or she has little control. The harraga's "deterritorialization" (the act of leaving to go somewhere else) is not a choice made of free will, but rather of economic or political necessity. Such migrants end up, thus, being enslaved by the forces of global consumption, as expressed here by Ursula Heise: "Those who live in less privileged regions of the world are also affected by deterritorialization, precisely because processes of exploitation involve them deeply in globalization. Workers in the developing world who are forced to follow the flows of capital experience deterritorialization in this way, as do farmers whose choices of products to cultivate are dictated to by the needs of First World markets."⁹

As outlined in their seminal *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's philosophy of the deterritorialized subject (born of the sociopolitical movements that changed the dynamics of Western culture and society in the 1960s) has often been used by scholars of cultural productions in the 2000s to theoretically conceptualize movement, or "deterritorialization on lines of flight," as leading to a positively formed global subject. This subject benefits socioculturally and politically from the connections migrants are able to make by simply leaving their home environment. Deterritorialization leads to new encounters ("multiplicities") and positive experiences that enrich the subject's being. Deleuze and Guattari argue, "Multiplicities are defined by the outside: by the abstract line, the line of flight or deterritorialization according to which they change in nature and connect with other multiplicities."¹⁰ When reterritorializing, the subject has become that much stronger and culturally astute for having encountered

other beings, environments, and networks contained within these multiplicities. Movement will lead to a subject's *becoming* through a "rhizome of connections."¹¹ They continue, affirming that "a rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things" and this "between things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one and the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle."¹² What is most remarkable about the rhizome is that it presents an infinite conception where the subject can always be *in process* as it forms its *becoming*: "becoming produces nothing other than itself."¹³ Deleuzoguattarian theories contextualizing subjecthood and its formation have often been used as a theoretical framework to articulate cosmopolitan and cross-cultural encounters and how these are depicted in world literatures and cinemas.¹⁴

Postcolonial theory has highlighted the dissolution of borders, thus challenging staid structures of language and identity creation to favor new terms for articulating the global subject. These new terms build a new ontological system that explains the positive connections that can be made through global, cultural, and political exchange, supporting the notion that "culture . . . resists enclosure and confinement." The global subject is grounded in "the making practical and theoretical sense of . . . boundless meanings" where borders, both real and symbolic, are porous. This is a view that "positions the bordering process [of the subject] as a dynamic component of the social production of space, the making of history, the constitution of society."¹⁵ This production is always translated as made up of the "active parts of the contextualizing of human life" where one's symbolic and tangible "borders and bordering develop in an ontological choreography that is always simultaneously and interactively spatial, historical, and social."¹⁶ Deleuzoguattarian philosophy has helped global theorists to define "all borders and boundaries" as "socially produced and reproduced, and thus [these] are always susceptible to being modified, transformed, erased, recreated, reimagined, transgressed."¹⁷ I propose here to think about how postcolonial "positive subjecthood" as defined within Western notions of becoming, incarnated in the "sujet mondial" who deterritorializes and reterritorializes—following lines of flight, through rhizomatic connections, over and through porous borders while profiting from capitalist consumption—is a theoretical framework that cannot apply to the harraga for many reasons even though they are *deterritorializers* par excellence.

Scholars argue¹⁸ that Deleuzoguattarian philosophy, in the context of postcolonial cultural production, offers a meaningful, if not symbolic, model through which to think about choice in relation to global connections and how they impact an individual's identity development. With respect to the harragas' dangerous journeys effectuated by clandestine deterritorialization and reterritorialization, these choices are anything but positive. As depicted in the Maghrebi films analyzed here, if anything, the harragas'

subjecthood—or potential to engage with a *becoming* of the *sujet global*—is the staid “arborescence” described as opposite to the fantastic, limitless possibilities a “rhizome” affords. Arborescence is rooted in “linkages between points and positions” that trap the clandestine traveler often in death (the desert he must get across to arrive at the sea to cross to Europe, and then the sea he crosses, but in which he often drowns).¹⁹ “The rhizome is anti-genealogy,” unfettered and free, unlike a tree with roots (arborescence) that is fixed in time and space forever.²⁰

Even though porous, borders in these films are daunting walls. Lines of flight, followed out of economic necessity, lead these economically enslaved travelers (particularly in Djadam’s *Frontières*) on paths where they risk annihilation rather than the ability to “regulate their own alliances, to determine them according to relations of complementary lines of descent” to enjoy the “unbridled power of alliance” gained through rhizomatic connections.²¹ Whereas the Western (white), globalized subject “assigns the line of flight a positive sign,” and is “carried” on paths of deterritorialization to “planes of consistency” where interaction with others infuses his “consciousness and passion,” the illegal Maghrebi traveler, following his lines of flight because of a life-or-death choice, will always be caught in “redundancy,” which Deleuze and Guattari warn is a possibility if the subject cannot break from fixed systems and rigid social models.²² The harragas’ deterritorialization does not mean freedom but rather is an action caught purely in a “signifying regime” within a “system [where] the line of flight remains negative.”²³ Departure leads to neither freedom nor power over an individual’s becoming because the motive for leaving is ultimately defined by the global forces in which she or he is trapped. In the process of illegal migrants’ deterritorialization across the Mediterranean, they are signified only by their *clandestinité* (illegality), as they are forced to act outside the borders of their home nations. The globalized paths in front of the harragas, across multiple countries as, for example, depicted in Djadam’s *Frontières*, lead not to enlightened subjecthood, full of positive “assemblages” and connections, but rather to a “black hole.”²⁴

In both internationally acclaimed films made by well-known Algerian cineastes, Merzak Allouache and Mostéfa Djadam, who have benefited from being global subjects in the positive sense, use their international connections to show audiences at home and abroad the perils of clandestine crossings. These films demonstrate the power of cinema to shorten the distance between the “persecutor and his victim,” unmasking the “causal chain between the unfortunate and the agent who causes his suffering.”²⁵

The Tragic Global and Local Backstories of Maghrebi Clandestine Crossings

The harragas’ millennial story, whether told on screen or on the page, is composed of certain themes that have become recognizable because they

are repeated so often. Interestingly in the past, characters in films such as Allouache's *Bab el-Oued City*, Krim Dridi's *Bye, Bye*, and Yamina Benguigui's historic depiction of Algerian migration in the 1970s as told in *Inch'Allah Dimanche* (Sunday God willing), tended to show protagonists "embark[ing] on large ferries to northward destinations" in order to find family members in France and Spain.²⁶ Or, travel took place in the opposite sense (always on legitimate ferryboats or airplanes) to rediscover family left behind as depicted in films such as *Prends dix-mille balles et casse-toi* (Take 10K francs and go home; Mahmoud Zemmouri), or because of deportation from France as depicted in *Wesh, wesh, qu'est-ce qui se passe?* (What's happening?) by Rabat Ameur-Zaïmech. Conversely, since the global economic downturns in the late 1990s and early 2000s, 9/11 antiterrorism legislation mandating severer European laws on immigration, and increasing unrest in North Africa, "scenes no longer show imposing ferries full of migrants awaiting employers and family members, but rather they depict fishing boats with desperate migrant hopefuls," risking the high seas.²⁷ Whether the film is Algerian, Moroccan, or even Senegalese (*La Pirogue* [The boat], Moussa Touré, is one example), the story is often the same: overcrowded tiny boats with desperate men (and sometimes a woman) who burn their identity papers on Algerian, Moroccan, or Tunisian beaches before embarking on a quest for what they perceive will be a better life in Europe. The shift in how these earlier films characterize Mediterranean crossings and labor exchange has been radical, reflecting the sociopolitical and economic turmoil of twenty-first-century North Africa. In the 1990s, migration back and forth between the two continents took place, more often than not, through legal channels. For example, in *Bye, Bye*, two brothers are wrestling with whether or not to stay in France or sail back to Tunisia. They do have passports and visas and, except for facing some xenophobia in Marseille, tend to consider themselves integrated as part of the Maghrebi-French community of the city. Their angst comes from their parents, who desire to return to the homeland and the pressure this causes children, who have rarely experienced their countries of origin. In the 2000s, films depict characters caught in socioeconomic chaos, forced to make plans for illegal travel out of desperation. There is no denying that this shift in the manner of travel is complex, indicating the micro- and macropolitics of what Hakim Abderrezak terms "the Maghrobal," which the scholar explains implicates "aspects of daily life closely associated with globalization" in the home nation.²⁸ The Maghrebi is, thus, bending under the weight of globalization as it affects his or her local economy. Maghrebi communities are adversely impacted by cheap imported goods, which, in turn, displace local trades, creating "local realities" of poverty and unemployment from which there is no escape.²⁹ In the case of Algeria, the fall in global oil prices, complicated by the failure of the postcolonial state to ensure the well-being of its people within the country, caused turmoil of catastrophic proportions: the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the early 1990s, and then a civil war that killed almost three hundred thousand people by the time the armistice was signed to end the conflict in 2005.

The regional politics among Maghrebi countries, as well as between the Maghreb and Europe, have also influenced the dynamics of the harragas' plight. Not only have the current wars in Syria and Libya contributed to the flow of millions of refugees across the sea, the breakdown of unity among North African countries themselves must be acknowledged. The once-hopeful bonds forged between Maghrebi nations, as evidenced in the 1980s and 1990s through pacts signed by entities such as The Maghreb Arab Union, established in 1989 with hopes of creating a EU-type structure for trading and exchange with Europe, is now but a distant memory.³⁰ Morocco's continuous requests in the 1990s for membership in the EU, based on recognition of a certain "méditerranité"—a Mediterranean identity—rather than "arabité" (Arab cultural specificity), further revealed the more general Maghrebi sentiment of kinship with the European-Mediterranean countries of Spain, Italy, and France, rather than Africa or the Middle East.³¹ Although the Union professed to defend "the spiritual and moral values descending from Islam and the protection of Arab national authenticity," it also had another, more important goal: "to unify the five signatory countries" listed above "into a joint trading partner with the EEC; thus promoting free-circulation of citizens and goods. As such, the UMA constituted a concerted turn toward the Mediterranean and away from the Middle East, and hence a means to specify the Maghreb in the Arab World."³² In 1998, less than ten years after the UMA outlined its common goals, these pronouncements have disappeared. The Mediterranean basin has been forced "into a space of rupture," symbolized by increased surveillance and political policy from Europe and physically, manifesting in such edifices as "the wall" erected in Spanish Ceuta, making this space into "a sort of Berlin wall across the Mediterranean into the Atlantic."³³ Those who embark on the dangerous sea, even if they make it safely to the other side, are often rounded up and immediately deported to their countries of origin. In the 2000s, the breakdown of this fragile Maghrebi union, and the closed-door, hardline policies of Europe on immigration, created the Maghrebi socioeconomically and politically compromised *sujet global* depicted in the films discussed here.

Being and Becoming a Harraga in Algerian Film

As the world looks on, little has been achieved to curtail illegal immigration by ameliorating the well-being of peoples living on the African shores of the Mediterranean.³⁴ If anything, in general, the ways in which Europeans view illegal immigrants from the Maghreb have become more severe, resulting in judicial legislation that is repressive and racist. *Frontières* (Mostéfa Djadam, Algeria, 2002) and *Harragas* (Merzak Allouache, 2009), are two films that bookend the first decade of the 2000s. These films offer European audiences a plethora of humanist questions to think about, encompassing the exploitive economies of First World global capitalist countries and the failure of contemporary African nations to provide for their peoples. Not only do we read the text of the

clandestine narrative, we are also confronted with the failed historic promises of revolutionary, decolonizing movements to establish prosperous, independent postcolonial nations that should have provided basic guarantees to their peoples. As clandestine immigrant Rachid explains in Allouache's *Harragas*, "we live in the neighborhoods of the forgotten . . . in misery, unemployment, drug trafficking . . . if you took a poll, 90% of the people here would say they want to leave."

Both films reveal interesting facets of clandestine immigration as contextualized in terms of language, race and ethnicity, and gender. The works denote how these facets influence an immigrant's agency as linked to current global capitalism and economic exploitation, as well as past colonial history and contemporary neocolonial practices wielded by Europe. In Allouache's *Harragas*, the three principal protagonists, Rachid, Nasser, and Imène, are educated and speak French and Spanish, yet they still find their lives in Algeria constrained through a series of dead ends: no job prospects, no financial means to buy apartments, establish families, and live a fulfilling existence. In a sense, there are no possibilities or "affiliations" and "corresponding relations" that make possible a successful becoming in Algeria.³⁵ When they do decide to pay a *pass-seur* (smuggler) for transportation in a tiny boat heading for Spain, they are confronted with realities bound up in stratifications caused by class, language, race, and gender that play out on the boat in the middle of the sea. The three young *bruleurs* are accompanied by seven others who are older and illiterate, several of whom "have crossed the deserts of the Sahara to reach the sea." The only shared commonality among the members of the group is their equal desperation to reach Spain.

The 2002 film *Frontières*, by Algerian Mostéfa Djadam, is the first Algerian film made in the 2000s to address illegal immigration from the Maghreb to Spain. The film is noteworthy for the messages it transmits, particularly regarding race and origins as bound in the trappings of capitalist globalization where, certainly in the twenty-first century, Africa has become economically poorer as a continent. The story begins on a small boat, floating along the coast of Senegal to Mauritania, where a group of men disembarks to join others waiting to illegally cross three countries in smugglers' trucks. They will cross Mauritania, go through part of the Algerian desert into Morocco, ending in Tangiers, where they will then embark on another small boat across the Mediterranean to Spain. There are five men in the group; four are from different parts of Francophone West Africa—Senegal, Togo, Chad, and Guinea. They are "les enfants de Charles de Gaulle" (the children of Charles de Gaulle) as one smuggler tells another, alluding to France's sordid colonial past in West Africa. The fifth, Avrey, speaks only English and has fled war-torn Liberia, where he was shot and has only just recovered in a refugee camp run by the Red Cross. The men are of various professions—mechanic, schoolteacher, sailor, and traditional healer—yet they all share a common desire to flee the continent, which has failed them on every level of development: socially, politically, and economically. After being dumped by the first set of smugglers in the desert of Morocco, they come across a Bedouin tribe,

which, for money, will smuggle travelers without passports northward across the desert. Here the men find a young woman, Amma, also from Senegal, who was abandoned by her husband. He left for Spain after stealing her jewelry to pay for his passage. In order to pay for her journey north, the head of the tribe forces her to have sex with him. Within the structure of this familiar harraga family journey,³⁶ so recognizable in other films and texts by African filmmakers and writers, Djadam examines questions that reveal the multiple dark underbellies of globalization that force people to take desperate action to try to better their lives. These travelers realize along the way, as Amma remarks, that “despair is the worst thing of all,” even worse than death because it is not finite but lingers, eating away at the immigrant’s soul.

Mostéfa Djadam’s *Frontières* plays on the obvious subject of borders throughout the film. The travelers illegally cross the borders of several African countries, which are indeed porous in geographically remote places. Although these particular borders are fluid, they are anything but pathways to power in the ontological sense of cosmopolitan becoming. They do not present, as scholar Edward Soja notes, “boundaries [that] demarcate the dynamic interplay of space-knowledge-power and the more subtle performances of human subjectivity and sociality” that have come to define the Western notion of positive globalized identity formation when frontiers are wiped away.³⁷ Rather, Djadam’s protagonists travel great distances over desolate desert borders, suffocating, stuffed in the back of trucks driven by Algerian and Moroccan smugglers. They dodge the civil war in Algeria, still going on in the early 2000s, and nearly die as they wander in the desert with little food and water after being dropped off by their Algerian smugglers at the permeable southern border between Algeria and Morocco. Once they arrive in Tangiers, they realize, ironically, that the shortest border to cross between Morocco and Spain is also the most arduous and dangerous.

In the remaining pages of this chapter, I will draw on these two films’ narratives to highlight how capitalist systems of globalization, often construed in the West as positive “modernization processes foreground[ed] above all on increased mobility as the main cause of deterritorialization,” are, for the harragas, impenetrable networks.³⁸ The flip side of this positive *sujet-global* narrative, grounded in deterritorialization and a cosmopolitanism that infuses a fulfilling *being-in-the-world* (as Martin Heidegger defines it³⁹) that philosophically attempts “to reconceptualize social, spatial, and bodily structures outside the classifications, categorizations, and boundaries usually imposed on them,” is a path unavailable for the harragas.⁴⁰ Being-in-the-world draws on Heidegger’s notion of *Dasein*: “an understanding of existence—as an understanding of the being of all beings of a character other than its own.”⁴¹ This being is understood as connected and formulated by a *being-already-alongside* with others. Being-in-the-world “is not just a fixed staring at something that is purely present-at-hand . . . [it is] fascinated by the world with which it is concerned.”⁴² This fascination leads to “intercultural scenarios” in which “two sign systems come into contact,” those of self and other.⁴³ The contact allows for a “new

mode of being,” or a third way of being that is the result of the positive interaction between self and other.⁴⁴ Looking at these films closely reveals several salient messages about migrant subjecthood and, in particular, the migrant’s being-alongside-others in relation to race, class, language, and gender as these elements play out in their narratives of failed global becomings. Both filmmakers present to their audiences the nuances of capitalist-global systems that are not fruitful and never will be for the illegal migrant. The harragas are unable to ever enter into egalitarian contact with others. Rather, they are stopped and arrested on beaches, stifled in detention centers, or even worse, drowned at sea, never breaking free of the capitalist bonds of exploitive labor in which they are entangled.

Race and Class in the Desert and on the Sea

While both films involve human trafficking, the dynamics they depict between the smugglers and the harragas they exploit are particularly scrutinized in Djadam’s *Frontières*. Although he is Algerian, Djadam brings to the forefront the continent’s slave narratives of the distant colonial past. These narratives posit not only the European colonizer’s but also the Arab’s contribution to black slavery that for centuries, as Freida Ekotto explains, meant “the exploitation of black bodies, the immigrant worker who runs from misery, endures or brushes death; imprisoned in holding camps; all the processes which remind us of what Frantz Fanon termed ‘the existence of the negro.’”⁴⁵ The subject of black bodies trafficked by Arabs (Algerians and Moroccans) widens the harragas’ narrative to expose how sub-Saharan immigrants continue in this century to be exploited by Maghrebis. Ironically, though, this contemporary slave narrative, as quips the older “Marabout” (Sage/Healer, as he is called by the group of fellow travelers), requires that “maintenant c’est les esclaves qui paient le transport” (now it’s the slaves who pay for transportation). Globalized twenty-first-century exploitation across Africa is contributed to by Maghrebi-Africans, specifically Moroccans and Algerians, who profit from the transportation of humans to the edge of the Mediterranean.

Djadam’s narrative reveals a Maghrebi racism that has rarely been examined in films on illegal migration. The film suggests, as sociological studies have shown, that “migration destinations [to] the Global North” and the racism that ensues there when local populations feel threatened are not limited to Europe. Increasingly, the political polemics of Maghrebi racism and general xenophobia have been construed much like they are in Europe.⁴⁶ Since the 1990s, Morocco in particular has become a destination “for migrants from sub-Saharan Africa . . . asylum seekers and refugees fleeing conflict and oppression in Democratic Republic of the Congo, Côte d’Ivoire, Mali, Cameroon or Nigeria, and most recently also from Syria and Iraq.”⁴⁷ Since 2014, Morocco has “granted legal status to more than 5,200” refugees and migrants as well as sub-Saharan students seeking an education at Moroccan universities.⁴⁸ Immigrants

migrating to a culture that is 99 percent Muslim and predominantly Arab-speaking have increasingly faced racism and xenophobia, which, in recent years, have reached alarming proportions.⁴⁹

Throughout Djadam's film, exploitation due to race is a constant factor that nuances the experience of the harragas from black Africa. The men and one woman are visibly marked by the color of their skin as illegal as soon as they cross into Algeria and Morocco. Despite Joe's (one of the youngest in the group) naive view that, in general for all of them, "il n'y a pas de frontières" (there are no borders), either in Africa or in the world, none escape racial profiling while in the Maghrebi north. "All borders should be opened to all travelers," Joe notes. Not only does their reliance on their Arab traffickers to get them to Tangiers turn them into exploitable goods (they are literally packed into trucks normally used to transport sardines), thus harkening back to the slave ship narratives of centuries gone by, once at their destination, because they are black, they are even more noticeable as visible targets for xenophobic Maghrebis. The color of their skin for Moroccans defines them solely as illegal and destined for exploitative menial jobs, which place them in the no-man's-land of the *sans papiers* (without documents) and legal recourse. The under-the-table arrangements used by exploited workers in restaurants and hotels allow them to stay out of sight to avoid being discovered by the police as they await the contacts who will ferry them across the sea. Amma is employed as a maid in a hotel, and Joe and Sipipi land jobs moving carpets for a carpet dealer in the back alleys of Tangiers's central souk. Two other men in the group, who try to sell cheap Chinese-made items on the streets, are quickly identified by the police and narrowly avoid arrest. Public space is dangerous and to be avoided, although Sipipi and Joe realize that in order to find passage across the sea, they must risk being visible in cafés and parks, where illegal transactions take place. Their black skin draws smugglers like flies whenever the men are in public space, suggesting that black Africans are considered only in Morocco for one thing: a money-making opportunity as goods to be shipped illegally to Spain. When Sipipi and Joe go to a park to discuss their predicament, they are immediately approached by young men who propose to arrange illegal travel at various prices. Although they protest, telling them "we will find our own way," they also soon realize that they are at the mercy of the smugglers' cartels operating in Tangiers.

Djadam makes a final point about the enduring racism and lack of African solidarity in the Maghreb in one of the last scenes before Joe and Sipipi leave the carpet owner's store. Their employer refuses to shake hands with them, instead simply waving them off with an "allez, bonne chance" (get going, good luck). The scene reveals what philosopher Julia Kristeva remarks is the confrontation with the other that makes the self realize "the possibility . . . of *being an other*. It is not simply—humanistically—a matter of our being able to accept the other, but of *being in his place* and this means to imagine and make oneself other for oneself."⁵⁰ These black Africans, whom he has exploited for weeks at low wages, have forced the Moroccan carpet salesman to consider the

unheimlich (the uncanny and uncomfortable) space he “deems” as occupied by the “foreigner.”⁵¹ Although he has needed them, he is also repelled by them. In this short scene, Djadam’s message reveals the irony of Moroccans’ denial about being African. Even today, their exploitation of people from south of the Sahara and the general racism that exists all over the Maghreb are rooted in a centuries’-old economic system built on slavery, which drew a distinct line between the Arab-Islamic/North and the primarily animist/black South. Operating in his own developing African country, the Moroccan carpet salesman is faced with the conundrum of needing “the foreigner” whom he rejects as an equal, but with whom, at the same time, he must also identify as cohabitating with him on the continent.⁵²

Racial divides construed as geographical boundaries between Europe-white and African-black are also part of Djadam’s narrative. Throughout the film, Joe, a young twenty-something from Senegal, has constantly affirmed his love for Vanessa, whom he says he has married. She is a young, white French woman he met when she was on holiday in Senegal. They have promised to meet up in Spain once he has crossed the sea. The older Sipipi doesn’t believe Joe’s story to be true until he finally hears the younger man speaking to his beloved over the phone. Joe hints that he has already “married” Vanessa (although probably not legally; this subject is left vague) and proclaims that she is the most beautiful of women, even when Sipipi teases him, stating, “all white women look alike, so what’s so special?” In the detention center, after Joe drowns, Amma and Sipipi observe Vanessa through the bars of their cell. She is real and has come to look for Joe. Her easy passage from France to Spain, thanks to her EEC passport, contrasts sharply to the *sans papiers* migrants’ imprisonment in the Spanish detention center. The possibility of fruitful “rhizomatic affiliations” that will allow for “ceaselessly establish[ing] connections” between others and places could possibly have been real for Joe and Vanessa if only the young man had been able to live.⁵³ Vanessa is only able to touch Joe’s body and make contact with it in death, zipped in a body bag, lying in the morgue. She slips off her wedding ring and places it on his chest. Through the bars of their cell, Sipipi and Amma observe the young French woman leave the detention center as she takes another path, easily able to deterritorialize as privileged by her skin color and nationality, to an unknown European destination the Africans will never see. Their deportation is imminent, thus fulfilling the Marabout’s prophecy, uttered early on in the film: “J’étais là où vous voulez aller, vous allez revenir, vous allez tous revenir” (I was there where you want to go, you will return, you will all return). For Sipipi and Amma, the only hopeful aspect of their detention has been the realization that they will return to Africa together.

Race and class greatly influence the behavior and social dynamics among the illegal travelers in Allouache’s *Harragas*. The five men who come from “the South” have trekked seven hundred kilometers from the desert regions of Algeria to join the group in the coastal town of Mostaganem (two hundred

forty-five nautical miles from the coast of Spain). Hassan, the smuggler, organizes the boat and the details. Allouache orients his audience to the five “Bedouins” whose darker skin contrasts sharply with that of the more urban, coastal Algerians. They are also accompanied by a darker-skinned African of an undisclosed nationality. Hassan mocks him as a “sale nègre” (a dirty nigger) and chastises all the men for not being able to communicate properly in Arabic. For days Hassan has forced these men, ignorant of the ways of the sea, to wait in a small hut on a remote beach, eating nothing but spaghetti. Meanwhile, Rachid, Nasser, Imène, and “le gros barbu” (the fat bearded) Hakim, a young man, devout in his Islamic beliefs, wait for their ride to join the group in an abandoned building that, Rachid remarks, “looks as if it was in a war.” All four were in school together, yet Rachid notes that religious Hakim “makes like he doesn’t know us.” Rachid’s break with Hakim, whom he professes he once knew as a friend, alludes to the general wariness of religious fundamentalists who—still in 2009—are viewed as responsible for the Islamic fervor that rose to its heights in the 1990s, fueling the civil war. “That’s how it was in our neighborhood,” quips Rachid. Divisions between camps drawn by allegiances to warring factions characterized the climate of Algeria’s bloody civil war and have framed most of these young adults’ lives.

When the four young people join the six men on the beach waiting for Hassan’s boat, they are confronted with a desperate Mustapha, a policeman by trade, who, wielding a gun, threatens them, demanding a place in the boat. He too is fleeing to Spain to escape “une grosse connerie . . . une affaire qu’[il] a mal réglée” (a huge mistake that he took care of badly). On the boat, tensions flare between Mustapha, still waving his gun, and the three “fils de papa” (rich kids) he judges Rachid, Nasser, and Imène to be. The heated conversation, in Arabic and French, alienates the other men who understand nothing of what is transpiring because they cannot comprehend those languages. Mustapha wonders, “you three, you had the chance to go to school, you’re not like these other poor fools. . . . It’s funny to see you three with these good-for-nothings . . . couldn’t you have gone to the consulate and gotten visas?” Tension increases in the boat when they become lost at sea, with little gas, and unable to chart where they are because of a “compass made in China whose hands seem to bob any which way,”⁵⁴ as Rachid angrily complains. When they finally do see Spain, their gas runs out and fights ensue. Pointing his gun, Mustapha attacks Nasser, who is then saved by Hakim, who hurls himself against the cop, toppling them both overboard. Neither can swim. As the others look on, “stuck in fear,” the reality of their equal fate confronts them. Regardless of skin color, class, or background, the ability to swim or not will dictate whether or not they make it to Spain. Out of desperation, Nasser, Rachid, and Imène decide to swim the rest of the way to shore, leaving the others who cannot swim on the boat. Having been raised on the coast of Algeria, it is geography that allows the three to make it to shore, whereas the men from the desert are left on the boat, victims of their rural, Saharan heritage.

Language and Alliances: The Limits of the Tower of Babel

These films demonstrate how language plays a role in illegal immigrants' ability to reach Europe. Since the well-traveled paths north are geographically located in former French colonies on the African continent, extending from the deserts of Mauritania up through Morocco and Algeria to the sea, one's ability to speak French assures better chances of completing the journey. Djadam's *Frontières* emphasizes the connections and alliances illegal immigrants are able to forge, ironically, due to their French-colonial past. "Les enfants de Charles de Gaulle," as these French-speakers from West Africa are designated at the beginning of the film, are able to negotiate, make demands, and defend themselves against the Moroccan and Algerian smugglers and opportunists who take charge of them much more easily than Liberian Arvey, who speaks only English. Without the linguistic ability to communicate with either the smugglers or his fellow travelers, Arvey is lost. Although all the men in the group are black Africans from West Africa, they are unable to communicate with the Liberian because of the colonial linguistic legacy their nations continue to endure. When the six are left at the border between Algeria and Morocco, they are forced to wander for hours in the desert, Arvey trailing behind them. When he at last succumbs to the heat and must lie down in the sand, the men are unable to understand his pleas for help. A huge scar on his stomach gives a clue to the reason for his physical fragility and what he has endured in Liberia, but the group cannot understand his story, which he deliriously recounts in English: "grenades, militia men . . . they start shooting, you get wounded." As his fellow travelers try to understand his story, it becomes distorted due to their inability to understand the nuances of this "foreign" language (Joe professes that he can "only understand certain words in English"). Arvey's lack of linguistic affiliation with the others makes him an outcast; his journey is doomed to failure. After some in the group take his money, Arvey is eventually abandoned in a hospital in a dusty Moroccan town. Once in Tangiers, the French-speaking West Africans' knowledge of one European language helps them to learn some key words in Spanish, the other European language of Morocco spoken particularly in this northern region. Both languages play important roles in determining how well the immigrants are able to survive as they wait for a boat. Getting jobs, negotiating in the streets, and avoiding being taken advantage of are all determined by how well the migrants use and manipulate language.

The travelers in Allouache's *Harragas* also are either victims or victors according to their linguistic abilities. Where Nasser, Rachid, and Imène easily switch from Arabic to French, the other men from the desert have no knowledge of the relevant languages that will help them once they arrive in Spain. As he narrates their story, Rachid wonders how these desert men "will fare, get jobs in Spain and avoid detection." In a strange twist of fate, though, as the film concludes, it is the destiny of the men left behind in the boat that remains unclear. Rachid, Nasser, and Imène are all eventually caught on the beach by the Spanish police, sent to detention centers, and then deported back to

Algeria. Yet, the men in the boat are picked up by a fisherman who doesn't respond in any European language when the men haltingly ask with the few words in English they do know if he speaks "English, Spanish or French." Their fate is left open-ended, alluding to the possibility that the unidentified fisherman perhaps helps them to European shores after all. Rachid's narrative only indicates that he "doesn't know what became of them; they could have made it or been deported . . . only God knows . . . that's life." Thus, as with social class, linguistic ability does not assure that the harraga can pass from the sea to European land successfully. Both filmmakers dwell on the fact that all illegal migrants are, to use the proverbial phrase, "in the same boat," and it is fate that decides who will win and who will lose.

Gender in Global Systems

Gender plays a significant role in migrant narratives. In both literary texts and films about illegal migration, women often function in these narratives as voices of reason, and as the conscience of men's impulsive actions. They are victimized not only by economics but also by cultural traditions, which leave them with very few options. As I have argued elsewhere,⁵⁵ often the women portrayed in these narratives choose to flee from their communities because their realities at home imprison them "in a fixed space, married or as brides-to-be, watched by families and governed by mothers and in-laws," who ultimately define their identities.⁵⁶ Women's lives within the context of traditional Maghrebi space are more often than not demarcated by masculine oppression and marginalized by poverty and illiteracy, which are daily realities of village life.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, Imène and Amma do seem to have more agency and control over the decisions they make in their lives than expressed elsewhere in texts on illegal immigration. These two young women do not share the victimhood depicted in other Maghrebi films, such as *L'Enfant endormi* (The sleeping child, 2004) by Moroccan Yasmine Kassari, which tells the story of wives left behind by their husbands in an impoverished Moroccan village. In Kassari's film, the village women must fend for themselves, eking out a meager existence in a very arid region where nothing has grown for years due to drought. Ultimately, the women are victims of their husbands' decisions to leave for work in Europe, and the local realities of their communities that are inscribed by global economic forces dictating negative outcomes that ultimately impact their survival. The men of these villages have been co-opted by global economic systems that have enticed them off their land. Their decisions to leave are also influenced by the political failures of a postcolonial nation that has done little for them during the severe droughts of recent years. These factors have all severely affected Morocco's GDP.⁵⁸ Kassari's film demonstrates that in their "subaltern" status, "women are structured by their . . . subjectship in capitalism."⁵⁹ They are subalterns to patriarchy, world economics, failed national agricultural programs, and environmental calamity.

Like many women depicted in the narratives of clandestine travel, Amma in *Frontières* has been forced to go look for her husband because she has no other resources to stay alive in her home village. Imène in *Harragas*, although “la plus diplômée du quartier” (having the most diplomas in the neighborhood), feels she must make the crossing to avenge her brother Omar’s suicide, the result of his failure to immigrate successfully to Europe, find work, and ultimately help his family back home. She also cannot face living without her fiancé, Nasser, in a country that can offer her nothing: “Je ne veux pas rester dans ce pays de misère” (I don’t want to stay in this country of misery). Yet, sometimes, staying in misery seems more rational than leaving, as Amma in *Frontières* notes. Standing on the shores of Tangiers, she confesses to Sipipi that she really “doesn’t want to go to Spain,” and that they should “just stay in Africa and try to make it.”

Ironically, in both films, the female protagonists’ choices, leading to illegal migration, allow them to break free from the bonds of gendered traditionalism in their communities. Curiously, it is their illegality that helps them to become free agents and gain some control over their personal lives. This is the gendered irony of global capitalist systems where subaltern women’s desire to embark on paths to the unknown also permits them more easily to usurp traditional, patriarchal, local systems of society. These local systems tend to suffocate women in static power structures. Breaking free of the bonds of the local-traditional, women follow their lines of flight and, if we consider this movement in terms of Deleuzoguattarian deterritorialization, allows for a freedom that enables “women to [win] back their organism, their history, their own subjectivity.”⁶⁰ In short, deterritorialization leads women to a “tout monde” (an everybody and an everything), or a new world where they might find economic equality allowing them to better their lives.⁶¹ Underscoring this philosophical conception of deterritorialized feminine freedom, scholar Carla Freeman affirms in more economically defined terms that where gender is societally “integral to social and economic dimensions” at the local level (where women are rooted in their communities and bound by certain standards of sociocultural tradition), its parameters are significantly altered when framed in the global macro sphere.⁶² Gendered “social and economic processes” on the local level become deformed when “associated with globalization.”⁶³ The global system rejects “the categorical separations presupposed in dichotomies [between genders],” thus “not only does the boundary between [men and women] change but so does the meaning of [their] polar terms.” As illegal migrants, men and women are put “in relation . . . [permitting] more than the two possibilities posited in either-or constructions” in their local communities bound by tradition.⁶⁴ Yet, as with class, gender ultimately does not define positive outcomes for illegal immigration. Indeed, as both films demonstrate, Amma and Imène, in the end, suffer the same deportation as the men in their groups. As some theorists have argued, although migrant laborers are the victims of capitalist exploitation (and women are often doubly victimized by sexual abuse and trafficking), on a theoretical level, these women’s deterritorialization into a global system

only allows them to visualize alternate paths for their own, unique *becomings*. The macro level of global flows into which they enter “as such . . . provide[s] a useful space for imagining new ways of interrogating globalization as plural, malleable, and multidirectional and thus for seeing capitalist penetration as potentially feminine.”⁶⁵ However, for Amma and Imène, the “imagined space” of positive capitalism through their successful immigration to Europe remains just as elusive at the end of Allouache’s and Djadam’s films as it was in the beginning. Indeed, positive outcomes for all the harragas are cloaked in ambiguity in the closing scenes of both films. Rachid, Imène, and Nasser are last seen on the Spanish beach under arrest before their final deportation, and Sipipi and Amma are left behind bars in a detention center. All the protagonists remain in limbo, where they are forced to the liminal edges of the imagined world they had hoped to know. Unable to deterritorialize, to go forward from this marginal place, they are condemned to return to their homelands.

The story of the harragas will continue to be documented in film and text as wars, famine, and poverty displace millions across North Africa. Equally certain are the First World global-capitalist systems that function thanks to these illegal migrants, some of whom do eventually make it to European shores. As films and texts about illegal migration reveal, as *sujets globaux*, these travelers’ fates are bound in the exploitive system that Western capitalism has forged for them. Both *Frontières* and *Harragas* reveal that for these migrants, a cosmopolitan, globalized “equalization of chances” within capitalist systems of labor is impossible.⁶⁶ These films prove to what extent deterritorialization as a means to positive “affiliation,” leading to prosperity and well-being, are reserved only for the very few—those who possess the documents, the passports, and the financial capital to secure “the key to all other becomings.”⁶⁷ These guarantees of smooth passage from one continent to another assure a *being-in-the-world* that is made through equal exchange with others. Such exchange, unfortunately, will never be for the harraga left to drift on the open seas.

Notes

1. A note about the regional distinctions of North Africa and the Maghreb is warranted here. In the geopolitical United States’ mindset, North Africa usually encompasses not only the three countries Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, but also Egypt and the Sudan. In the French context, “le Maghreb” signifies the three former French colonies: Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. I will use the two interchangeably here to make a point about geopolitical views promoted by Europe and the United States. “Maghrebi authors and filmmakers,” though, are understood as having origins in France’s three former colonies.

2. Hakim Abderrezak, *Ex-Centric Migrations: Europe and the Maghreb in Mediterranean Cinema, Literature, and Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 8–9.

3. *Ibid.*, 12.

4. This number has significantly risen in the last few years due to the wars in Libya and Syria. For example, between 2006 and 2009, a total of 2,103 people died trying to cross in small boats from North Africa to Spain. Of these deaths, 80 percent were by drowning (Abderrezak, *Ex-Centric Migrations*, 20). At the end of his film, *Harragas*, Merzak Allouache lists the various regions of the Mediterranean where thousands of North Africans have been lost at sea.

5. Other films by Moroccan filmmakers include *Tanger, rêves de brûleurs* (Tangiers, dreams of the burners, 2002) by Leïla Kilani and the fictionalized docudrama *Et après* (And after, 2002) by Mohamed Ismaël. Algerian productions include the documentary *Harguine, Harguine* (2007) by Meriem Achour Bouaakaz and the Tunisian film *Aéroport Hammam-Lif* (2007) by Slim Ben Chiekh, which documents clandestine crossings from Tunisia, <http://www.africultures.com/php/?nav=article&no=9206>.

6. Abderrezak, *Ex-Centric Migrations*, 21.

7. Freida Ekotto, "La Mondialisation, l'immigration et le cinéma africain d'expression française. Pour un devenir moderne," *Nouvelles Études Francophones* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 185.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Ursula Heise, "Deterritorialization and Eco-Cosmopolitanism," in *Literature and Globalization: A Reader*, ed. Liam Connell and Nicky Marsh (New York: Routledge, 2011), 159.

10. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1987), 9.

11. *Ibid.*, 238.

12. *Ibid.*, 25.

13. *Ibid.*, 238.

14. Studies that look at globalization from a more positive, cosmopolitan angle include: David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1989); Arjun Appadurai's *Globalization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), and Kwame Appiah's *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: Norton, 2007). These studies are grounded in looking at cultural exchange that can happen when people are able to make Deleuze and Guattari's proverbial alliances work for them. However, more often than not, even the most positive assessment of globalization will still emphasize that "globalization is contained within its own contradictions." Liam Connell and Nicky Marsh, "Introduction," in *Literature and Globalization: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2011), xvii.

15. Edward Soja, "Globalization, Regionalism, and the Postmetropolitan Transition," in *B/Ordering Space*, ed. Henk Van Houtum, Olivier Kramsch, and Wolfgang Zierhofer (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 34.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*

18. See the work of Brian Massumi, Réda Bensmaïa, Tom Conley, and those scholars mentioned in note 14. New work in Affect Theory also tends to

privilege the positive aspects of Deleuzoguattarian philosophy in terms of globalization and identity formation.

19. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 21.
20. Ibid., 11.
21. Ibid., 247.
22. Ibid., 133.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid. In Deleuzoguattarian theory, “assemblages” are positive groupings (we could say communities) a subject can make through the act of deterritorialization to other spaces and places. The “black hole” to which Deleuze and Guattari refer in *A Thousand Plateaus* is, of course, a place that allows for no assemblages, movement, or encounters.
25. Bruce Robbins, “The Sweatshop Sublime,” in *Literature and Globalization: A Reader*, ed. Liam Connell and Nicky Marsh (New York: Routledge, 2011), 41. These films have been shown widely in Europe to critical acclaim. However, it is debatable if they have had any real impact on influencing European audiences’ increased empathy for or view of the plight of the harragas. In the current climate, with thousands still dying in armed conflicts in North Africa, at sea in tiny boats, and in refugee camps, I have become more skeptical as to whether or not cultural production can really change political will to do anything for the millions of migrants in flux.
26. Abderrezak, *Ex-Centric Migrations*, 18.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., 15.
29. Ibid., 90.
30. Ibid., 14. UMA, l’Union du Maghreb arabe, included the nations of Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia.
31. Ibid.
32. Paul Silverstein, *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 224.
33. Abderrezak, *Ex-Centric Migrations*, 15.
34. Of course the same can be said for immigration and emigration in the Americas.
35. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 239.
36. It is interesting that all the clandestine stories mentioned in this essay take on a similar character mix, i.e., one woman and seven to ten men, all forced to throw their lot together in a tiny boat.
37. Soja, *Globalization, Regionalism*, 34.
38. Heise, “Deterritorialization and Eco-Cosmopolitanism,” 159.
39. Here I am drawing on Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time* (New York: Harper Collins, 1962).
40. Heise, “Deterritorialization and Eco-Cosmopolitanism,” 158.
41. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 33.
42. Ibid., 88; emphasis mine.

43. Maik Nwosu, *Markets of Memories: Between the Postcolonial and the Transnational* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2011), 13.

44. *Ibid.*, 23.

45. Ekotto, "La Mondialisation," 185.

46. Mohamed Berriane, Hein de Haas, and Katharina Natter, "Introduction: Revisiting Moroccan Migrations," *Journal of North African Studies* 20, no. 4 (2015): 505.

47. *Ibid.*, 513.

48. *Ibid.*

49. *Ibid.*, 514.

50. Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Léon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 13.

51. *Ibid.*, 282.

52. *Ibid.*, 187.

53. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 7.

54. Allouache refers in this scene to China's exploitation of Africa, certainly in the new millennium. Since the 1990s, China's growing presence through investment in public works projects and local economies has led many Africans to remark that they are once again being colonized by an outside force. See the article: Knowledge @Wharton Network, "China's Investments in Africa: What's the Real Story?," <http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/chinas-investments-in-africa-whats-the-real-story/>.

55. See my book, *Screening Morocco: Contemporary Film in a Changing Society* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011).

56. *Ibid.*, 140.

57. *Ibid.*

58. According to one article, "15 percent of the GDP and 40 percent of all employment" are linked to "the agricultural sector in Morocco . . . [which] is highly volatile and dependent on climatic conditions." See: Lahcen Achy, "Morocco's Drought Threatens Economic Growth," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, May 20, 2012, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/05/20/morocco-s-drought-threatens-economic-growth-pub-48803>.

59. Joseph Medley and Lorraine A. Carroll, "The Hungry Ghost: IMF Policy, Capitalist Transformation and Laboring Bodies in Southeast Asia," in *Literature and Globalization: A Reader*, ed. Liam Connell and Nicky Marsh (New York: Routledge, 2011), 284.

60. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 276.

61. *Ibid.*, 280.

62. Carla Freeman, "Is Local: Global as Feminine: Masculine? Rethinking the Gender of Globalization," *Signs* 26, no. 4 (Summer 2001): 1007–37, 1008.

63. *Ibid.*, 1009.

64. *Ibid.*

65. *Ibid.*, 1015.

66. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 277.

67. *Ibid.*

Nollywood Comedies and Visa Lotteries

Welfare States, Borders, and
Migration as Random Invitation

Matthew H. Brown

If 2015 saw the largest wave of migration to Europe since the Second World War, 2016 might be defined as the year of migration policy responses.¹ While the mass movement of human beings across the Mediterranean Sea and the southern borders of Europe garnered unprecedented global attention in 2015, many analysts turned their attention to the ensuing financial costs, not so much for the countries migrants left, but for the various Southern European and North Atlantic nations to which they fled. The extent of the financial crisis was particularly evident in the success of a popular referendum (colloquially called “Brexit”), which called for the United Kingdom to leave the European Union in order to gain greater control over its borders. Donald J. Trump echoed the rhetoric of crisis in his proposal to build a wall along the United States’ southern border—and then bill Mexico for its construction—as did UK Prime Minister David Cameron in his proposal to expel immigrants whose income was deemed inadequate for contributing to national prosperity. Gestures like these imply that the economic underdevelopment of the global South, the outbreak of civil war in relatively poor countries, and the rise of international terror organizations like the so-called Islamic State are problems for the world’s largest economies to the degree that they strain national budgets, which are meant to serve national citizens. In the rhetoric of crisis, migrants are depicted as liabilities more often than fellow citizens of the world, and they are rarely depicted as potential new laborers, taxpayers, or innovators in the global North. As an article in the *Atlantic* suggested, the “crisis” was less

about migration and more about the status of the modern welfare state and its relationship to the increasingly global movement of labor and the bodies that perform it. Indeed, at the heart of the Brexit decision, and the rise of other nationalist policy positions around the world, is an important question about who is responsible for ensuring that ordinary people have access to work and social security in an increasingly interconnected world. Are welfare states responsible only to their natural-born citizens? What about the external workers and resources upon which the economies of welfare states rely? The 2016 immigration crisis raises a critical and productive question for social and cultural theory: What is the relationship between the concept of the welfare state and the concept of borders?

In this chapter, I look to Nollywood—Nigeria’s popular, commercial film industry—for insight about the relationship between welfare states and borders. Nollywood films frequently exhibit an ambivalent, ironic, even sardonic conception of immigration policy from nation-states like the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Comedies, in particular, effectively use metaphor and allegory to both evade addressing migration policies directly, as well as cast in sharp relief the contradictions in those policies. Often these contradictions are distilled into the object of the travel visa, which is a mechanism of both opening borders, but also controlling passage across them, symbolizing the ambivalences of immigration policy. Furthermore, Nollywood films metonymically associate all travel visas with the kind of visa lottery program that the United States operates and to which thousands of people apply each year.

In some of the comedies I discuss in this chapter, cross-border travel is only temporary, not strictly migratory, but the compressed time line of temporary travel allows the films to address the simultaneous welcome and rejection that immigrants so often experience in host countries. I argue that the chasm between the global North’s appetite for labor and its unease with extending welfare are compressed into narratives about visa programs that appear open and generous, but also desultory and capricious, therefore highlighting what some theorists have called the “casino” quality of the contemporary global economy. This casino quality registers in some Nollywood comedies as a form of migration I call “random invitation,” in which the liberal welfare state invites people into its labor markets, but in a fashion seemingly without coherence or logic.

This chapter begins with a discussion of key concepts associated with liberal welfare states and borders, as well as the contradictions that arise from them. I then proceed to an examination of how these contradictions played out during the development of the United States’ Diversity Visa Lottery program. The issues at stake in this history are addressed by two different kinds of comedy narratives that are discernible across four Nollywood films—*Osuofia in London*, *30 Days in Atlanta*, *American Visa*, and *Visa Lottery*. The first two work together to cast the Nigerian migrant to the global North as an object of simultaneous desire and dejection. The latter two cast the visa lottery program as evidence of the corruption of the global economy. Finally, I conclude by drawing out some

of the theoretical implications that arise from taking these comedies seriously as forms of political commentary.

For Whom the State (Charges) Tolls

The most obvious association between the concept of the welfare state and the concept of borders is one of access. If the modern welfare state is defined as an institution pledged to ensuring that members of a particular group have, in addition to liberal and democratic rights, what some political scientists call “industrial” and “social” rights,² then it is necessary to determine who is and who is not in that group. Inherited from previous political formations, national borders are convenient tools for making these determinations. Those within belong to the rights-deserving group and those without do not. Contemporary migration patterns and increasingly open labor markets *might* call this primary association into question, but not necessarily so.

Perhaps the simplest translation for “group of people” in my definition of the welfare state is “citizens,” and whether migrants are understood as potential citizens, or as perpetual noncitizens; the relationship between citizens and migrants is, at least initially, mutually exclusive. To be a migrant is to cross the national borders from one’s place of citizenship into another nation where one lacks citizenship (leaving aside, for the moment, internal displacement, and migration from and to a country where one lacks citizenship). Indeed, the degree of correlation between one’s place of birth and one’s citizenship remains extremely high globally, and borders play the key role in determining this correlation. Borders, therefore, are also the mechanisms by which reevaluations of the correlation are made possible.³ Thus, inasmuch as citizenship is a political category dependent on the borders of a nation, and the welfare state is dependent on citizens, the welfare state is inconceivable without borders.

Recent scholarship in political science and geography unconvincingly argues that citizenship is becoming increasingly disentangled from geography or national borders. As one set of theorists has phrased it, “As a legal status and bundle of rights, citizenship can be carried abroad and exercised from outside.”⁴ The traditional association of citizenship with territory, therefore, may seem to be weakening. Political scientists also point out that within supposedly unified territories, citizenship is enacted through a variety of subnational jurisdictions “that enjoy various degrees of administrative or political autonomy.”⁵ Both of these observations—that citizenship crosses borders and is complex within them—are meant to update the modern cultural history of nation-state citizenship, which is now widely understood to have involved, essentially, the political enfranchisement of white male workers in Euro-America. Postnational citizenship language, however, betrays the centrality of geography. To “carry” citizenship abroad, for example, suggests that it has to be packed, while inside a territorial boundary, and then taken “outside,” where it is “exercised” remotely. Indeed, it is for this reason that the migrants at the center of the so-called crisis

of 2015 changed location. The “legal status and bundle of rights” they sought were available only within the borders of another territory.

Among the rights sought by many of the 2015 migrants, we must assume that economic stability (industrial and social rights) was one of them. What makes the following year’s “crisis” a crisis at all derives from the assumption that the very rights granted by the welfare state to its territorially bound citizens, and to which migrants seek access, are threatened by the migrants themselves. In crossing the border, and triggering a reevaluation of citizenship, migrants may weaken the very mechanisms by which the welfare state protects industrial and social rights. Indeed, if the state cannot guarantee them to everyone, then it may not be able to guarantee them to anyone. This kind of speculation makes sense largely because the mechanisms of industrial and social rights are themselves geographically dependent. They begin with infrastructure and “public goods,” including clean water, electricity, railroads, airports, seaports, data cables, and streets, as well as schools and parks. Next come the tax abatements and other legal technologies that ensure certain industries will make use of the available infrastructure and provide employment for citizens and investment opportunities for those with capital. Legal protections for labor, for vulnerable populations like children, and for certain kinds of property help strengthen the relationship between people and the territorially focused mechanisms of state intervention. And finally, the mechanisms that tend to register as welfare proper, such as health care and food assistance, often depend on the availability of physical institutions that can coordinate with the state, including hospitals and supermarkets. Pensions and unemployment benefits may, theoretically, be detached from geography, but to the degree that they depend on beneficiaries having labored in institutions either directly operated by the state, or indirectly facilitated by state policies, they are in practice also territorially bound. Simply put, if there is a finite number of mechanisms available to protect industrial and social rights, or their geographical reach is finite, then the influx of people making demands on those mechanisms, or so the thinking goes, will strain them. But that really is a big “if.”

The notion that people excluded from the territorially bound category of citizenship inevitably threaten the relationship between citizens and their welfare-state apparatuses has little empirical support.⁶ The research on this subject is fairly robust. I turn to these findings shortly after examining the major assumptions from which much of this research proceeds. When migrants can become citizens, and therefore expand not only the demands of the welfare state, but contributions to it, there is no reason to expect strain on the state. Citizens pay the very taxes that fund the welfare they claim. However, this may also be true when migrants are not able to become citizens. After all, noncitizens are rarely nonlaborers or nonconsumers. They may be required to pay certain income and sales taxes without being able to claim certain forms of welfare. Indeed, most Euro-American governments have devised highly complex methods of extracting work from noncitizens while withholding certain citizenship benefits in industries like agriculture. Yet even when citizenship

benefits *are* provided to migrants, and at very high rates, as they are in Sweden, the net cost of immigration is actually rather minimal.

Joakim Ruist has studied the phenomenon of migration, labor, and welfare extensively. He argues that the demands that refugees, in particular, have placed on Swedish social assistance spending were canceled out when barriers to contributing to the labor market were lowered.⁷ He bluntly concludes that “in shaping policies to reduce the redistribution to the refugee population, it appears wise to focus on policies that seek to increase the employment rates of refugees.”⁸ Migrants, in such a context, can only be characterized as a strain on the welfare state to the extent that they are kept away from formal labor. In fact, it is by erecting barriers to employment that ideologues actually underwrite the argument that welfare is a form of “nannying.”

Ruist’s findings are not unique. Sociologists have repeatedly found that migrants tend to provide a net benefit when allowed to make contributions to labor, especially when the wages for that labor feed into entitlement programs like pensions or social security. The problem, of course, is that this result relies on a number of long-term calculations, which are disincentivized at the level of popular politics. Encouraging immigration from relatively poor nations to large, powerful nations is not only fiscally sound but politically advantageous, which is highlighted by the small and often neglected instrument of migration known as the visa lottery. The case of the United States’ Diversity Visa Lottery program is exemplary.

The Diversity Visa Lottery

In 2002, Anna O. Law published an insightful and revelatory history of the United States’ Diversity Visa Lottery program. The program began in earnest in 1988, but Law traces its origins to the Immigration Act of 1965, which abolished and replaced race, ethnicity, and country-of-origin considerations with two very different visa eligibility considerations: family relationships (to current US citizens) and employment skills. Immigration from all countries was capped at twenty thousand visas per year. The 1965 legislation immediately met racist and xenophobic protests, which the Johnson administration actually indulged by responding with a series of statements suggesting that, even though the law would technically open the door wider to immigrants from Africa and Asia, the law’s focus on relationships to current US citizens and on employable skills would in fact favor Europeans. Those statements, however, turned out to be misguided. The 1965 act did increase relative immigration rates from Asian and Latin American countries, while the European countries that had experienced the most recent major emigration waves to the United States—Ireland and Italy, in particular—saw proportional rates decline. Ireland had no greater fraction of skilled laborers than most other postcolonial countries, and the new law ended up encouraging illegal Irish immigration throughout the early 1970s, which Congress flagrantly ignored. Italy was

initially plagued by a backlog of families on waiting lists, which then resulted—to the consternation of many Italian Americans—in a loss of interest in migrating to the United States. In response, several “enterprising Congressmen,” as Law phrases it, laid the groundwork for the Diversity Visa Lottery program by attempting to appease their ethnic constituents.

In the 1970s and 1980s, American legislators of Irish and Italian ancestry introduced various complicated laws to, in essence, raise caps and circumvent the 1965 skilled labor immigration rules so that more migrants from Ireland and Italy would be able to get in. These politicians also introduced new rhetoric into the American immigration debate, such as the concept of a “seed immigrant,” an Irish or Italian immigrant who had no US family relations or labor skills but brought with him or her a pioneering spirit and the potential to create new families and new communities that would resemble established American families and communities. These legislators argued that the United States, as it had come to be known in the 1960s and 1970s, was built by Irish or Italian immigrants, and that the 1965 act amounted to a new kind of exclusion act, a method pursued by previous policy makers—namely, in the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the exclusionary Immigration Act of 1917. It took some time, but by the 1980s, these reactionary ideas culminated in the argument that Ireland and Italy were “adversely affected countries,” which, through various bureaucratic processes, became a generalized class of countries defined as taking advantage of less than 25 percent of their annual allotment of US visas. All countries in the class were invited to submit a new round of bulk applications, ten thousand of which would be chosen at random and allotted visas regardless of family ties or skills. The largest beneficiaries in the first years were Ireland, the United Kingdom, and Canada, as they were targeted by advertisers and coordinated efforts were introduced to get large numbers of applications in on time. The new program was called a “Diversity Visa Lottery,” drawing on the new rhetoric of multiculturalism that prevailed in the 1980s but fooling none of the US immigrant communities from Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Indeed, many activists from those communities challenged the new program’s inherent racism, particularly during the debate that surrounded its formalization through the Immigration Act of 1990. Since the early to mid-1990s, however, Irish interest in the program has faded as that country’s economy has improved, and the major beneficiaries of the lottery have been countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Togo, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, and Poland. Law cites Nigeria as potentially the greatest beneficiary of all. In fact, Nigeria has been so prominent in the program that, in recent years, it has not been invited to participate.

Given this complex history and the sociologists’ findings that migrants tend to offer long-term net benefits to welfare-state institutions, there can be little doubt that any characterization of the current moment as a “crisis” for rich countries proceeds from a narrow view of the concept of the “nation” within the formulation of “nation-state.” These are what James Hampshire calls “contradictions of the liberal state.”⁹ The rich countries of the global North have

always benefited from and have often encouraged immigration, and they still do, but they have always wanted to select those migrants carefully, even racially. The irony that efforts to institutionalize the selection process, while also paying lip service to a hollow conception of “diversity,” has inadvertently allowed a country like Nigeria to send disproportionately large numbers of its people to the United States is not lost on Nigerians.

In the remaining pages of this chapter, I focus on how Nigerian filmmakers play with this irony through semiosis and narrative. A handful of Nollywood productions employing comedy as their primary mode of address, and portraying either attempted or successful—but also temporary—migration from Nigeria to a rich country of the global North, depict migration as a process of random invitation. Rather than stress the costs and ethical ambiguity of emigration from Nigeria, or the alienation and hardship of immigration to the host country, or even the wonders of Northern capitalism, the Nollywood comedies I study here exploit the very idea that rich welfare states desire Nigerian immigrants, yet neither party—neither the Nigerian, nor the host—is quite capable of fully conceptualizing the tangible benefits of satiating that desire.

Nollywood Comedies and Random Invitation

In *Global Nollywood: The Transnational Dimensions of an African Video Film Industry*, Jonathan Haynes contributes an entire chapter on Nollywood video films dramatizing emigration from Nigeria. He groups them together as a “diaspora genre,” to which he attributes unifying features, such as “a typical story arc, moral and psychological themes, and formal features.”¹⁰ As he systematically elaborates on these features, Haynes offhandedly states, “Leaving aside for a moment the comedies, in which the trip abroad tends to tumble into the laps of the central characters, in most other cases the protagonists leave Nigeria because of a more or less desperate need to make money.”¹¹ The films I am considering help us understand why Nollywood comedies deal with the engines of migration differently than films utilizing other modes of address. Through a careful analysis of these films, we are able to say more not only about the engines of migration and how popular culture responds to them, but about the engines of narrative and the comic mode itself. Comedy may be capable of making unique social and political interventions. And it may deepen our understanding of the social and political spheres—particularly the relationship between states, welfare, and citizens.

The four films examined here are *Osuofia in London*, which has long been considered Nollywood’s most successful film and has certainly attained canonical status in Nollywood studies; *30 Days in Atlanta*, which supposedly grossed the highest box office earnings of any Nigerian film ever released in cinematic theaters (a somewhat dubious metric given that cinema release and patronage are not particularly representative of film consumption in Nigeria); *American Visa*, which stars Nkem Owoh, the actor famous for playing Osuofia; and

Visa Lottery, which stars Ime “Bishop” Umoh, one of Nollywood’s most talented young comic actors. The first two are not explicitly about visa lotteries, but one relies on the success and generic characteristics of the other to metaphorize a temporary trip abroad and the implications of confused migration policies in the host country. The latter two depict aspects of the actual visa lottery process—even if only fleetingly—but do so by placing emphasis on the concepts of seduction and fraud.

Osuofia in London is well known to most scholars of Nollywood and, as those familiar with the film will no doubt recognize, it contains no mention of a visa lottery system. The titular protagonist is approached one day and simply handed a visa in order to retrieve an inheritance that awaits him in London. My reason for including it here is that the film works in tandem with the more recent *30 Days in Atlanta* (henceforth, *30 Days*) to address the process of migration as the sort of random invitation more commonly embodied in visa lotteries. Indeed, *30 Days* makes direct intertextual linkages to certain elements of *Osuofia in London*, thus exploiting the older film for a kind of gravitas made possible by the film’s success and canonization. Among these intertextual linkages is the fact that the invitation abroad falls on a most unc cosmopolitan and, therefore, least-deserving person. The yams that *Osuofia* packs to take to London are upgraded to a goat, green plantains, stockfish, and palm fruit in *30 Days*. In Atlanta, Nigerians admonish white folks for kissing in public, while in London *Osuofia* tries to cover a young girl’s exposed thighs. And in place of *Osuofia* ordering pounded yam at a London McDonald’s, *ogogoro* is ordered at an academic reception in Atlanta. These are more than just gags; they are among the most memorable and quotable moments from each film, constituting what Moradewun Adejunmobi has recently called “modalities of recognition,” which make production and consumption efficient and legible in a popular, informal, commercial media context without modalities like trailers and other forms of glossy advertising.¹² Haynes refers to parts of this process as the “repeating” of “winning formulas.”¹³ In this vein, one online review of *30 Days* states, “All these elements are somehow strung into the plot of the film which plays like a hybrid between *Osuofia in London* and *The Return of Jenifa*, in which there is no single, continuous plot but a series of sketches and happenstances cobbled together to make up a movie.”¹⁴ According to the review, then, Adejunmobi’s “modalities” and Haynes’s “formulas” are hard at work. *30 Days* is legible precisely because it is composed of small motif-like units that appear across a range of films. Thus, one way to conceptualize the relationship between the two films is as two renditions of one generic structure and series of plot devices. *30 Days* takes the chance-invitation device, where the migration opportunity “tumble[s] into the laps” of the main characters, in Haynes words, and further fleshes out its lottery significations. Indeed, while the trips in both of these films are intentionally temporary—that is, nonmigratory—their effect is to compress the issues inherent in a truly long-term migration system into a single border crossing. So, while not migration as such, these compressed trips may be more effective at raising a set of particular migration issues.

The crucial visa lottery scene in *30 Days* takes place very early and very metaphorically. Richard (Ramsey Nouah)—a handsome, successful, urbane information technology specialist—has brought his cousin Akpors (Ayo Makun, stage name A.Y.)—a stock “bushman” character from Warri, near the Niger Delta—to the opening of an upscale housing development in Lekki, just outside Lagos. All the attendees have been entered into a raffle for the evening’s biggest door prize—a one-month trip for two to Atlanta—and of course Akpors, who looks slack-jawed at all the evening’s sights, wins the prize. Through a game of chance, Richard and Akpors gain the opportunity to go to Atlanta in which they stand to lose nothing, or in which there is no bet, but the payoff is spectacular. The raffle may not be a US State Department program, but it is a more effective visual stand-in for popular conceptions of the Diversity Visa Lottery program than the actual bureaucratic process itself. Richard is painstakingly constructed by the film as meeting the basic work and education eligibility requirements for the program even though an actual temporary visa not only ignores work potential but prohibits paid work, an issue that the film later exploits. And rather than hours of tedious paperwork and significant personal expense, the visa lottery process appears to be a matter of being in the right place at the right time.

When Richard and Akpors arrive in Atlanta, they quickly exceed being tourists and begin testing the limits of the US immigration system, which the film makes possible through the tension it constructs between migration and temporary travel. Are Richard and Akpors seeing the sights, or setting down roots? At a restaurant called Metro Fusion, which is run by Nigerian Americans and caters to African immigrants, Richard meets Kimberly (Karlie Redd), the beautiful daughter of the owner. While Kimberly slowly warms to Richard’s amorous advances, she is impressed by Akpors’s ability to make people laugh. She eventually offers him a job doing stand-up comedy at the restaurant, where his jokes reference the African immigrant experience in the United States. However, because he is on a tourist visa, Kimberly pays Akpors under the table. Meanwhile, Akpors is introduced to Kimberly’s family friend, Clara (Lynn Whitfield), an African American woman who turns out to be an immigration attorney. She too is taken in by Akpors’s humor and, therefore, each man now has an American citizen as his love interest. The ensuing romantic tension, created by the fact that each man must eventually leave the country, is thus mirrored in the overarching bureaucratic tensions.

The key series of immigration policy metaphors begins when Akpors joins a dice game with four young men in an alleyway during the middle of day. As he rakes in a large pot of money, one of the men pulls a gun on him. Here, a game of chance puts a Nigerian immigrant in the position of taking potential income from unemployed men. This is precisely what skeptics fear about Diversity Visa Lottery programs. In an act of defense, Akpors breaks a bottle and chases the men away, but the clash between the immigrant gambler and the unemployed men triggers a response by the executive forces of the government. Police chase Akpors and take him into custody. Luckily, Clara has the

skills and connections to bail him out. As Akpors sits on the other side of a glass partition, Clara argues for his release and tells the officers in charge that, “This young man is here in America because he won. He won a prize to come here.” The conversation then turns to the large amount of cash Akpors had on him when arrested. From the other side of the glass, Akpors yells, “I dey work. I be stand-up comedian for Metro Fusion. I work for my money.” One of the officers then smiles menacingly. “You violated your visa. You broke the law.” Akpors’s response: “I don’t break the law. Na bottle I break!”

Akpors is released but must appear in immigration court. At the hearing, his stand-up wages are the primary bone of contention. The conversation between Clara and the judge is pure fantasy, mixing legalistic phrases and spurious logic, resulting in the conclusion that Akpors may go free if he donates his wages to charity. In this moment, the symbolic migrant is being held at arm’s length from the labor market. It might make more sense if his wages were garnished for tax purposes, but the film invents an uncompromising fictitious legal framework. Either the migrant breaks the law and is incarcerated, or the migrant works entirely for the benefit of the host nation and the welfare it administers to its natural-born citizens. The government is not, in this case, taking a portion of the migrant’s wages to provide welfare for its citizens; rather, it uses its executive authority to make the migrant worker hand over his entire earnings directly to citizens. This formulation gives the middleman—the state—an especially ominous position in the transaction. Indeed, there is no room in this formulation for both the migrant and the host society to mutually benefit, which is made to seem utterly inconceivable. Of course, a film looking at this problem from a Nigerian perspective does not leave the issue there. Nollywood comedies have ways of not only visualizing the benefits that Nigerian immigration offers the host society, but how those benefits might be claimed.

Before leaving, Akpors grudgingly donates his earnings to an orphanage. Then he and Richard prepare to fly back to Lagos. They do not overstay their visas, but they also do not simply depart. At the airport, they are surprised by Kimberly and Clara, who have come, tickets in hand, to join them on the flight to Lagos. Like *Osuofia in London*, then, the symbolic migrant is leaving with something more than money or underserved public goods. Cast in the conservative gender politics characteristic of Nollywood, Richard and Akpors hit the host country where it hurts the most. They are taking American women. Meanwhile, the women reverse the typical migration pattern. While Samantha (Mara Derwent) in *Osuofia in London* follows Osuofia to Nigeria in pursuit of his fortune, Kimberly and Clara follow Richard and Akpors for love. In both cases, citizens of the global North migrate to Nigeria for something unavailable in their prosperous nations. Once again, this is fantasy, but fantasy meant to elicit pleasure in specific ways. Taken together, *30 Days* and *Osuofia in London* combine in the public sphere to depict the means by which “the trip abroad tends to tumble into the laps of the central characters” as a certain kind of invitation. Hosts in the global North find these men extremely desirable—because of fiscal or physical virility—and invite them in, but with multiple caveats and

stipulations, some of which make no sense. In the end, these comedies suggest that the Nigerian (male) migrant is something to be sought after, even when he has little savvy about the world. They also suggest that the system by which the global North deals with its needs, desires, and obligations—however they are metaphorized—is confused and broken.

It is not only the American or British systems that are broken, but the Nigerian system too. In *American Visa* and *Visa Lottery*, the United States' Diversity Visa Lottery program is really only a subplot, despite the titles of the films. In both cases, the protagonists, who are played by established comedians, struggle in every aspect of life, especially in their financial and romantic pursuits. A visa to enter the United States is both a way out of their difficult situations and emblematic of them. It is also a complete ruse. In each film, the modality of recognition is built on a plot structure where the comic fool is seduced by a woman and then duped by scammers who pose as visa lottery entrepreneurs. In the end, the fool has neither the woman nor the visa, and falls further into penury. Spectators may enjoy these foolish antics from a distance, but the fact of the matter is that they have also been duped. After all, the films are themselves scams, making use of the lure of the visa lottery program to falsely advertise themselves. As a result, the spectator is invited to feel cheated in much the same way as the comic fool.

Charles Piot has done ethnographic work among visa lottery entrepreneurs in nearby Togo, and many of his findings also apply to the Nigerian context.¹⁵ Commonly referred to as “lotto visa” in Togo, the program has spawned an entire industry of middlemen who help connect would-be migrants with viable applications. Of particular importance is the fact that each successful applicant is allowed to bring a spouse and children, “thus opening a space of considerable play,” where middlemen can facilitate the conglomeration of fictitious families who maximize the payoff associated with one lucky roll of the dice.¹⁶ Piot relates this kind of fraud to similar phenomena, such as the infamous Nigerian 419 scam, which have become prevalent in what he calls the “neoliberal moment in West Africa.”¹⁷ Piot further argues that in West Africa the Diversity Visa Lottery program becomes “an act of conjuring, generating something of value (here, an identity, a proxy citizenship) out of nothing—conjuring that seems emblematic of the neoliberal moment more broadly, with its casinos and pyramid schemes and income-generating lotteries and stock market ‘futures.’”¹⁸ Indeed, this moment has generated accepted social scientific terminology, coined by Susan Strange and then taken up by Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff. “Casino capitalism,” they call it, is a system that increasingly resembles a gambling hall, with players placing endless bets on one another and the system at large, and where most wealth seems to be created from next to nothing.¹⁹ The visa lottery scam featured in *American Visa* and *Visa Lottery* is, therefore, an extension of the global financial system within West Africa. Like the lights of Las Vegas shining across the desert, the seductive power of gambling, for access to streets of gold, is really just a beautiful mirage. In the titles they have given to their films, Nollywood producers have multiplied the mirages.

Titus, Owoh's character in *American Visa*, and Johnbull, Umoh's character in *Visa Lottery*, are drawn into playing the lottery because of women who constitute part of the mirage in both stories. They seduce libidinous men into being defrauded by 419ers who set up fronts, accept large fees—supposedly in exchange for help filing paperwork—and then disappear. In Titus's case, it is one of his many past girlfriends, Linda (Anita Hogar), who is part of the scam, persuading Titus to pay hundreds of thousands of Naira in the hopes of getting a visa and taking her to America. Her partner in crime—her husband, in fact—is the quintessential man-behind-the-desk who features so often in the visual culture of the scam, and he strings Titus along for weeks until, finally, Titus sees them together and becomes wise. At that point, part 1 of the film ends and the American visa plot device is virtually discarded. But the point has been made: an American visa is but a specter no more tangible than the seductive evil woman. As with the water sirens of local folklore, its tantalizing horizon lies across an ocean of random chance.

In Johnbull's case, the scammers tell him explicitly that America wants men like him. "Na lie!" Johnbull exclaims, but the scammer continues to assert that America really wants able-bodied young men like himself. Visibly flattered, Johnbull nevertheless resists. "I want America more than America wants me." Here, the comedian puts the issue as succinctly as possible. He acknowledges that, indeed, America wants him, but his greater desire for access to American industrial and social rights complicates the process. Earlier in the film, in fact, Johnbull sat with his friends, drinking in a bar, and speculated wildly about the provision of public goods in the United States. Among the things he imagines are roads paved with gold and government agents who walk up and down them, handing out pocket money to citizens. These fantasies are animated by the fact that, while nations like the United States have trouble making sense of the tension between immigrant contributions to and demands on welfare, as well as the effect of that tension on the economy, conditions in much of the global South are so dire that immigrants understand the mere existence of such a debate as proof that the nation-states of the global North are unbelievably functional. In other words, Johnbull recognizes that the desire for migration is mutual, but his words make plain that structural conditions render his desire far more acute. Of course, Johnbull pays the scammers a considerable sum and when he returns to check on the status of his application, the office is empty and the scammers are gone. And while fraud is found around the world, its ubiquity in Nigeria serves as evidence of the incredible dysfunction of the postcolonial nation-state.

While the scammers may be condemnable because they generate income without generating anything of value, these films place greater condemnation on the gullibility of the comic fool. They normalize the premise that neoliberal logics of casino capitalism operate widely. The spectator is rewarded for being able to see the game and is invited to glean pleasure from knowing more about it than the character on screen. However, Comaroff and Comaroff point out there is no such thing as capitalism without production.²⁰ Someone

somewhere must do the work, must fabricate or farm the commodities upon which all of the speculation of neoliberal finance capital really hinges. The problem is that the garment manufacturers, for example, or the people living on top of oil around the world are not benefiting from the system to which they actively or passively contribute. If they regard the visa lottery as a foundation for seduction, manipulation, and deceit, they may be using the very rules of the game to undermine it. According to Piot, “Lotto visa is nothing if not a passionate plea to establish rights to inclusion in a global system.”²¹ The films under scrutiny here may very well further that plea.

Laughing at Welfare in a Borderless World?

By what mechanisms would it be possible for the people who contribute to the prosperity of a territory, outside of which they live and to which they cannot claim citizenship, nevertheless claim the industrial and social rights that flow from that prosperity? Maybe migration is simply a way of making that claim in a world that still uses the antiquated concept of borders to determine group inclusion. An open market for goods and labor ought to come with an open system of group identification and, when it does not, it may be tested and strained by its users. Moreover, when it comes to popular narrative forms for considering this dilemma, it is possible that comedy is best suited for dealing with the critical cultural conundrum that the confrontation between welfare and borders incites.

According to Haynes, economic desperation is the “tunnel” through which “visions” are focused in most Nollywood diaspora films.²² But the affect of desperation may rely on the idea that there are different economic systems in the world, and in one place the economy is very bad, while in another it is very good. This formulation is amenable to earnest, melodramatic narrative, in which good and evil tend to be strictly Manichean. And certainly it is true that in some places the economy works better than others. But another way to conceptualize the situation is as the manifestation of one system, one economy, from which some benefit precisely because others do not. Indeed, the fact that the economy is increasingly and even thrillingly global, while access to its rewards are dependent on the outmoded concept of borders (and even walls)—of keeping the gains in and claimants out—may produce an affect associated with aporia, such as profound puzzlement. Humor, as some cognitive scientists have theorized, may have evolved as the best strategy for the human mind to deal with aporia, or “incongruities.”²³ When the brain is confronted with a contradiction it cannot resolve, one method of dealing with it is to produce a sense of pleasure, using laughter to induce endorphin release, which plasters over the partition. Over millennia, human beings have become addicted to the pleasure of laughter and have learned how to manipulate its associated cognitive mechanisms by inventing narratives with specially designed incongruities in them. Comedies allow us to deliver the drug at will.

Humor is not entirely about pleasure, however. Sardonicism, in fact, is about the appearance of pleasure in a situation otherwise marked by violent pain. We might detect the signals of a deep-seated and pervasive fear of the formerly colonized world made violently material in the global North in the rhetoric of Brexit, Trump, and Cameron; in the ethnic favoritism exhibited by legislators across the United States; and in the rise of far-right movements like Pegida in Germany, the Golden Dawn in Greece, and the National Front in France. In the aftermath of the Brexit vote, many casual observers were quick to point out that the same Britain that decided to close itself off to the world had, less than a century earlier, viciously colonized much of it. Indeed, postcolonial theory may be coming home to roost, as it were. It is as if the global North has become aware of the demands for a more fully human global modernity—the hallmark of postcolonial theory, at least according to scholars like Achille Mbembe²⁴—and is terrified of the sacrifices necessary to realize it. In an earlier moment of theoretical production, one of mostly discursive and intellectual migration from the global South—rather than the material form that prevails in the early twenty-first century—this was also fodder for comedy.

In his defense of associations between certain strands of postmodern and postcolonial theory, Tejumola Olanyian has referred to a comic parable about the relationship between the emergence of postmodernism in the West and the objectives of postcolonial discourse. Olanyian states,

One of my former teachers, who is African American, used to joke that non-Western peoples have long been attacking the master's exclusive and exclusionary privileged mansion with all sorts of weapons; when finally they succeeded in smashing down the doors—to subjectivity, to self-representation—the master, potbellied with satiation, came out, teeth-picking and belching, to claim that there was never anything of value in the mansion of the subject anyway. So, why are you guys trying to get in?²⁵

In Nollywood comedies, there is a similar kind of playful disposition to a key feature of the modern world. The “non-Western peoples” of the planet seem to be trying harder than ever to get into modernity. And while that plays out in practical but also cynical ways on the ground, comedies come into the “mansion of the subject” by the back door. In some comedies, the inhabitants of the mansion want to invite formerly colonized subjects in, but cannot find a place for them and instead let them leave with a woman of their choosing. In others, the inhabitants also want to invite the abject in, but the potential migrants are stymied by the fact that the mansion encourages everyone to game the system. It is not clear who invented the game or who benefits from defrauding it, but everyone must play it. House rules.

Nollywood's recourse to allegory and comedy should not be mistaken for a lack of political commitment. There is a significant body of Nollywood scholarship that finds pointed critique of specific political issues, often related to the Nigerian state, being dealt with in Nollywood through allegory.²⁶ Yet even

when Nollywood's allegorical brand of political critique is less formally political—that is, less specifically micropolitical and more vaguely macropolitical—the combination of allegory and comedy is both less denotative and potentially more effective. For humor to plaster over aporia, it must locate and evaluate that aporia. It must carefully set up the joke before delivering the punch line. To reiterate James Hampshire's position, immigration "reveals deep contradictions at the heart of the liberal state," some of which I have considered here.²⁷ Moreover, the Nollywood comedies I have considered use those contradictions to set up jokes about the farcical nature of contemporary global political economics. The laughs they deliver help spectators live in a world marked not only by extreme economic asymmetry but by the total inability of the global regime of liberal rights and obligations to deal with it. After all, if the exemplars of liberal principles of statesmanship—the rich countries of the global North—can invent a global regime of finance, international governance, and warfare to promote those principles around the world, but are being deeply riven by them at home, then what else can one do but laugh?

Notes

1. This argument was also made in the *Atlantic* by Heather Horn, "Can the Welfare State Survive the Refugee Crisis? The Economics—and Morality—of Admitting Immigrants," *The Atlantic*, February 18, 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/02/welfare-state-refugees-europe/463272/>.

2. Anton Hemerijck, "Two or Three Waves of Welfare State Transformation?," in *Towards a Social Investment Welfare State?: Ideas, Policies and Challenges*, ed. Nathalie Morel, Bruno Palier, and Joakim Palme (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2012), 36.

3. As Michael Dummet argues, the obligations of a state may only cease in relation to noncitizens outside the state's borders. In all other cases, it seems, states have obligations to all categories of people. See *On Immigration and Refugees* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 79–85.

4. Rainer Bauböck and Virginie Guiraudon, "Introduction: Realignments of Citizenship: Reassessing Rights in the Age of Plural Memberships and Multi-level Governance," *Citizenship Studies* 13, no. 5 (2009): 439.

5. *Ibid.*

6. See, for example, the classic work of Julian L. Simon on the United States, *The Economic Consequences of Immigration into the United States*, 2nd ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999); or new work on the United Kingdom by Christian Dustmann and Tommaso Frattini, "The Fiscal Effects of Immigration to the U.K.," *The Economic Journal* 124 (2014): F593–F641.

7. Joakim Ruist, "The Fiscal Cost of Refugee Immigration: The Example of Sweden," *Population and Development Review* 41 (2015): 567–81.

8. *Ibid.*, 580.

9. James Hampshire, *The Politics of Immigration: Contradictions of the Liberal State* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013).

10. Jonathan Haynes, "The Nollywood Diaspora: A Nigerian Video Genre," in *Global Nollywood: The Transnational Dimensions of an African Video Film Industry*, ed. Matthias Krings and Onookome Okome (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 73.

11. *Ibid.*, 82.

12. Moradewun Adejunmobi, "Modalities of Recognition," closing keynote address, University of Wisconsin–Madison, Pyle Center, Madison, WI, March 12, 2016.

13. Haynes, "The Nollywood Diaspora," 80.

14. Wilfred Okiche, "Movie Review: AY's 30 Days in Atlanta Is Funny But Poorly Made," www.Ynaija.com, November 22, 2015.

15. Charles Piot, "Border Practices," in *Hard Work, Hard Times: Global Volatility and African Subjectivities*, ed. Anne-Maria Makhulu, Beth A. Buggenhagen, and Stephen Jackson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 150–64.

16. *Ibid.*, 152.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*

19. Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, whose work Piot is referring to, draw their terminology from Susan Strange, *Casino Capitalism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997).

20. Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, "Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming," *Public Culture* 12, no. 2 (2000): 298.

21. Piot, "Border Practices," 162.

22. Haynes, "The Nollywood Diaspora," 82.

23. Matthew M. Hurley, Daniel C. Dennett, and Reginald B. Adams, *Inside Jokes: Using Humor to Reverse-Engineer the Mind* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011).

24. Achille Mbembe, "What Is Postcolonial Thinking?" Interview by Olivier Mongin, Nathalie Lempereur, and Jean-Louis Schlegel, *Eurozine*, Eurozine 2008, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2008-01-09-mbembe-en.html>.

25. Tejumola Olaniyan, "Postmodernity, Postcoloniality, and African Studies," in *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*, ed. Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 638.

26. See Jonathan Haynes, "Political Critique in Nigerian Video Films," *African Affairs* 105, no. 421 (2006): 511–33; Akin Adesokan, "Practicing 'Democracy' in Nigerian Films," *African Affairs* 108, no. 433 (2009): 599–619; Cajetan N. Iheka, "Nollywood and the Nigerian Dream: The Example of Teco Benson's *Formidable Force*," *The Global South* 7, no. 1 (2013): 122–36.

27. Hampshire, *The Politics of Immigration*, 15.

Accented Cinema

The Context of Nollywood

Babatunde Onikoyi

Critical scholarship on Nollywood has demonstrated its significance for African and global cinema.¹ With the upsurge in theoretical advancements and detailed film analyses drawing primarily on cultural studies and reception studies, the future of Nollywood scholarship looks quite promising. The transnational dimensions of Nollywood are crucial to these recent advancements in film studies scholarship. Recently issues of exile, the black diaspora, immigration, and migration have become staples for filmmakers who live outside Nigeria. Studies by Jonathan Haynes, Sophie Samyn, Claudia Hoffman, Ono-oke Okome, and Paul Ugor, for example, have mobilized critical categories for understanding what exilic filmmaking entails in the context of Nollywood, categories that I mobilize throughout the course of this chapter.² Many Nollywood films concerned with migration and exile detail the deplorable state of the homeland and highlight the reasons as to why there is mass movement of Nigerian immigrants to surrogate societies in the First World.

This chapter examines Chineze Anyaene's *Ije: The Journey* by paying acute attention to the issues of exile, migration, and the diaspora showcased in the film. Chineze Anyaene has created some of the best epic folktale films and is perhaps the most successful Nigerian filmmaker living abroad. Upon her enrollment for a master's degree program in directing at the New York Film Academy, she became the first student in the history of the New York Film Academy to shoot on a Kodak 35mm camera. She is the founder of Xandria Film Outfit in Lagos, Nigeria. *Ije: The Journey* is a well-made film that centers on two sisters' "unbreakable bonds of loyalty and the power of the human spirit."³ The film features two of the leading lights of contemporary Nigerian cinema: Genevieve Nnaji and Omotola Jalade Ekeinde. Both actresses have acquired a reputation for their stellar performances on screen. Genevieve Nnaji, for

example, had a lead role in the film adaptation of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Nigerian female actresses are emerging in large numbers and are able to pursue more complex roles as a result of these two colossal Nollywood ambassadors.

Migration, exile, and living in diasporic locations are common among African people due largely to bad governance on the continent, which has led to the pursuit of opportunities abroad. In Nigeria, for instance, youth routinely search for avenues to escape economic hardship by seeking opportunities abroad.⁴ The economic conditions in Nigeria have deteriorated over the years. As a result of extremely high youth unemployment and rapid population growth, migration is often an attractive option for many in the country. To carve out a living in Nigeria can be challenging for the average worker earning a ridiculous minimum wage of about 25,000 Naira (about \$80 US). Nollywood filmmakers who live in host countries are aware of the challenges of living in Nigeria and often draw on them for their cinematic practice.

Given these historical and social conditions, migration and exile have become commonplace themes for Nigerian filmmakers who ply their trade in First World countries. The style of their films is emblematic of those caught between what I call "double-different-worlds," which highlights their ability to relay the African experience outside their homeland. This filmmaking practice contributes to the quality and style of some of the most ambitious productions circulating locally and internationally.⁵ In this chapter I underscore the significance of Chineze Anyaene's *Ije: The Journey* as a transnational film. This chapter employs Hamid Naficy's notions of "accented cinema" to delineate the various specificities that qualify Anyaene's film as a quintessential instance of accented cinema. The chapter will further show how the practice of accented cinema has become very significant to the emergence of New Nollywood productions.

Accented Cinema: Theoretical Framework

Naficy focuses extensively on diasporic, exilic, and postcolonial cinemas that he addresses through an examination of the cinematic apparatuses of cultural identity, thereby deconstructing the hegemony of Western culture. Naficy writes, "By and large they (accented cinemas) operate independently outside the studio system or the mainstream film industries, using interstitial and collective modes of production that critique those entities. As a result they are presumed to be more prone to the tensions of marginality and difference."⁶ Naficy's historical overview traces how post-1960s cineastes from the Middle East, South Asia, and Latin America replicate their individual sojourns in exile and in the diaspora. A few examples relevant here are the filmmakers Trinh T. Minh-ha, Ghasem Ebrahimam, Mira Nair, and Ann Hui. The filmmakers he investigates are originally from the Third World who are "making and exhibiting films not only in their own countries but also increasingly across national boundaries, finding receptive audiences in Western film festivals

and commercial theatres and on television.”⁷ In this way, accented filmmakers respond to the dominant film industry by subverting its overbearing styles, modes, and hegemonic prowess. By drawing on experiences of their own exile or displacement, the filmmakers are able to disrupt the hegemony of Western filmic practices and focus the viewer’s attention on pressing issues facing those in the Third World.

Although the term *accent* is an aspect of language referring to a different pronunciation that also indicates where a speaker comes from, or a speaker’s specific educational or social background, it is also a trope relating to identity. It is the most common, “intimate and powerful marker of group identity and solidarity, as well as of individual difference and personality.”⁸ Therefore, by extension the term *accent* in cinema specifically defines the quality of “all alternative cinemas.” Naficy writes the following in this regard: “each is accented in certain specific ways and through various visual styles and techniques that distinguish it.” The films Naficy identifies as illustrative of accented cinema derive their own accent from their artisanal and collective production modes, and from the filmmakers’ and audiences’ deterritorialized location. By implication, “all exilic and diasporic films are accented,” yet they are accented in their own unique ways.⁹

In *Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*, Naficy stresses that filmmakers in exile exhibit common traits such as living in between culturally distinct spaces, leading double lives, practicing artisanal mode of production, employing authorial voices in their films, managing racial and political identities and tensions in host communities, nurturing a sense of longing for the homeland, experiencing displacement and constantly journeying—which are peculiar to “de-territorialised peoples.” These elements show how their movies operate on specific shared “features which in today’s climate of lethal ethnic difference needs to be considered, even emphasized.”¹⁰ The paradigm of the accented cinema as underlined by Hamid Naficy deals with the fusion of worlds, cultures, and traditions in an ever expanding globalized economy. Its qualities are steeped in the mingling of different filmic aesthetics and disparate cinematic codes, languages, motifs, and diverse cultures.

Accented cinemas explore pressing postcolonial issues of which the tensions of exile and living in the diaspora are central. Accented cinemas highlight the fact that filmmakers in the diaspora “are not just textual structures or fictions within their films, they are also empirical subjects situated in the interstices of cultures and film practices and (they) exist outside and prior to their films.”¹¹ What this implies is that accented filmmakers create protagonists in their films who adequately share in their hopes, frustrations, and desires as exilic figures. The filmmaker’s mode of production is indebted to the multiplicity of cultures they embody and wish to showcase through filmic representation.

Naficy’s description of modes of production is relevant for an analysis of many Nigerian films such as Chineze Anyaene’s *Ije: The Journey*, Tony Abulu’s *Dr. Bello*, Kingsley Ogoro’s *Osuofia in London*, MacCollins Chidebe’s *Boys from Holland*, Sola Osofisan’s *Missing in America*, Obi Emeloye’s *Mirror Boy*, and

Onye Ozi: The Messenger, to mention a few. These are quintessential examples of Nigerian works that can be classified as accented cinema, defined by their “interstitiality” and “artisanality” through which they are able to “operate both within and astride the cracks and fissures of the system, benefiting from the contradictions, anomalies and heterogeneity.”¹² Through the material conditions that determine their mode of operation, these local and international filmmakers “resonate against the prevailing cinematic production practices, (but) at the same time benefit from them. As such, the best of the accented films signify and signify upon the conditions both of exile and diaspora and of cinema.”¹³ The films belonging to this group of Nigerian filmmakers consist of frames that comment, lament, condemn, and delve into the social and psychological dimensions of their place of origin, as well as their surrogate societies and cultures. More of these characteristics shall be examined in relation to *Ije: The Journey*.

Ije: The Journey chronicles the lives of two Nigerian sisters in their quest for fulfillment of their aspirations. Anyanwu, the older sister, travels to the United States to earn a living as a singer, while Chioma, Anyanwu’s younger sister, decides to stay back. Anyanwu fulfills her dream of becoming a singer, no thanks to her rich, crooked husband, Michael Michino, who lives a picaresque life. Anyanwu lives a life of misery because of Michael’s indecent lifestyle and relationship with malicious rogues and cocaine dealers. The story unfolds gradually when Anyanwu sends a letter to Chioma about her incarceration following the killing of the rogue who raped her because her husband lost his money in a game of cards. Out of frustration and in order to get the money back, he places Anyanwu as a bet. Subsequently, there is a struggle between Michael and his rogues, which leads to his immediate demise. Anyanwu, in self-defence, frees herself and shoots the two rogues, resulting in her arrest.

Chioma arrives in the United States, and upon visiting her sister in jail promises Anyanwu, “You will not go to prison because of your husband’s impetuousness.” Anyanwu is charged with second-degree murder and Mrs. Baron, Anyanwu’s lawyer, advises her to plead guilty for an act committed in self-defence. Angered by Mrs. Baron’s request, Chioma seeks the help of another lawyer, Jerry Turner, who is relieved of his job by his boss, Mrs. Baron, after losing a “high profile murder case.” Reluctant at first, Jerry Turner takes up the case after learning about Anyanwu’s precarious situation during a news broadcast on television. It is important to stress here that race plays a key feature in the narrative. Mrs. Baron is white and admits to Chioma that her sister’s status as an African immigrant, and her lover’s whiteness, will all but guarantee that she will be convicted of second-degree murder. Jerry, an African American, takes up the case and eventually pursues a romantic relationship with Chioma. By forging a link between African immigrants and an African American who literally comes to her defense, the filmmaker is showing points of political and racial alliance blacks in America forge despite cultural and ethnic differences.

Amid the tension Chioma embarks on a private investigation when she searches her sister’s house for clues. She finds a pendant belonging to a witness

at the scene. Jerry and Chioma find the eyewitness, Mrs. Caroline Vasquez, a freelance housemaid who is in the United States illegally from an unidentified country in Latin America. Vasquez gives reliable information about all that happened, proving not essentially the innocence of Anyanwu but that she is a victim who, according to Jerry Turner, “is treated as a suspect.” Mrs. Caroline Vasquez reveals that Anyanwu was raped. After pleading his client’s case in court, Turner requests that the accused be allowed to testify, which Anyanwu does despite feeling disgust, anger, shame, pride, defiance, and loss of dignity. Following her confession, the jury requests a state pardon from the judge, which does not render Anyanwu innocent, but does make it possible for her to serve a less severe punishment of six months and twenty days in jail. The sentence leaves her with about twenty days left behind bars, as she had already spent six months in incarceration. The story ends well as Anyanwu regains her freedom. The film closes in a gradual fade-out as Chioma and Anyanwu reflect and share their childhood memories

Accented Nigerian Cinema: New Nollywood

The remarkable quality of New Nollywood films is inspired by a collective initiative by Nigerian filmmakers to measure up to world-class, high-budget films. Considering the degree of sophistication, the quality of scripting, shooting, framing, narrative style, and so on, Sophie Samyn has questioned whether this category of films can be called Nollywood.¹⁴ Critical writings on the emergence of these high-quality Nigerian films stress that these works differ considerably from films made by conventional Nollywood filmmakers. By “conventional” I mean those whose films “reckoned more in terms of crass commercialism and unimaginative aesthetics than for its deep contribution either to the enlightening of the human condition or its interrogation of the African predicament.”¹⁵

Moradewun Adejunmobi has described conventional Nollywood as “Old Nollywood.”¹⁶ Conventional Nollywood is different from emerging New Nollywood films, which have inscribed a set of templates “and enforced a paradigmatic shift from the norm, gradually transforming the status quo into what Jonathan Haynes has authoritatively theorized as ‘New Nollywood.’”¹⁷ The term “New Nollywood” gained prominence as a critical and theoretical concept in film studies in 2014, when in his work, *Auteuring Nollywood: Critical Perspectives on The Figurine*, Adeshina Afolayan examined the exemplary practice of a group of emerging films that differed from Old Nollywood movies. Afolayan emphasized that the term emerged “as a form of revulsion and indeed challenge to the negative and pessimistic portrayal of Nollywood, ironically perpetuated by its status as the largest film producing industry in the world.”¹⁸ According to Haynes, there is a conscious effort by a radical few “to make films with higher budgets, to screen them in cinemas both in Nigeria and abroad, and to enter them for international film festivals.”¹⁹ New Nollywood, then, differs from its predecessor by moving away from negative representations of

Nigeria and by its commitment to producing high-quality films for the global marketplace. New Nollywood films highlight modern metropolitan lifestyle of Lagos. These films rely on novel opportunities “for distribution, prompting a number of filmmakers to begin experimenting with high-stakes, big budgets films explicitly intended for exhibition at national, regional and diasporic cinemas.”²⁰ The many constructions of “multiplex cinemas” in Lagos and other cities like Ilorin, Abuja, and Akure, among others, testify to the ever-increasing signs of a fresh cinema culture.

If Kunle Afolayan’s film style marks the turn to New Nollywood, then it is fair to state that Chineze Anyaene is the pioneering Nigerian filmmaker who brought Nollywood’s accented film genre to world prominence. Anyaene’s *Ije: The Journey* is credited as the first film made by a Nigerian in the diaspora. Having attended the New York Film Academy in Los Angeles, California, in 2005, Chineze Anyaene was full of ambition to become a world-class filmmaker. American actors feature prominently in her films. This instance of foreign collaboration underlines the uniqueness of *Ije: The Journey* and situates it within the broad spectrum of “Nollywood Diaspora” genre films, which are “films set partly or overtly overseas.”²¹ *Ije* is an example that adequately measures up to the criteria of accented cinema: a desire to journey to the West and a longing for the homeland.

In Jonathan Haynes’s recent book *Nollywood: The Creation of Nigerian Film Genres*, he examines a number of Nollywood examples of diasporic works and stresses that Nollywood’s popularity around the globe has been more than enormous “as Nigerian actors and directors have travelled abroad to make movies and Nigerian expatriate communities have sought to express themselves in this essential form of modern Nigerian culture.”²² The movies set abroad are obviously an “extension of Nollywood in their direct derivation from fundamental conceptions and practices” of filmmaking in Nigeria as they represent “life overseas.” Haynes further submits that the Nigerian films made abroad “clearly constitute a genre (though it does not have a generally accepted name), with a typical setting, formal features, story arc, and moral and psychological themes.”²³ This category shows how Nollywood films are constantly capable of replicating “news and stories” to foster unity, maintain oneness, and “to follow the dangerous fates of the emigrant bearers of their society’s hopes and desperation, to understand the historical drama of the second great dispersion of Africans from the continent.”²⁴

Chineze Anyaene’s *Ije: The Journey* as Accented Cinema

In her incisive essay “Postcolonial Feminisms Speaking through an ‘Accented Cinema: The Construction of Indian Women in the Films of Mira Nair and Deepa Mehta,” Subeshini Moodley posits that films made in the diaspora can be viewed and approached as visual representations “engaging in dialogue between the home and host societies of the filmmakers.”²⁵ If her sociological

study of accented Indian female filmmakers is anything to go by, it would not be out of place to say that Chineze Anyaene's *Ije: The Journey* qualifies as a major text involving such dialogues. Moodley's model partially accentuates Hamid Naficy's theory that people of the diaspora have a tendency to attach themselves to notions that embody ethnic "consciousness" and "distinctiveness." Moodley submits that "consciousness" and "distinctiveness" are specifically

achieved through an awareness and perpetuation of elements specifically characteristic of, or associated with homeland. This is often not favourably received by either the home or host societies. The reason is that on the one hand the host country, in some instances interprets maintenance of tradition, culture or ethnicity as an assertion or imposition on their society. On the other hand, the home country may sometimes view a diasporic move out of their country as a betrayal or rejection of their tradition, culture and ethnicity—whether or not the diasporic community attempts to maintain, or is critical of these elements.²⁶

The reference to Moodley's work is useful for understanding *Ije*. Firstly, it gives a description of the characters in Anyaene's film as they relate to the situations both within and outside their host countries. Secondly, it demonstrates the tenuous relationship filmmakers have with their homeland and host countries. Finally, it sheds light upon the cultural tensions and politics of cultural assimilation and the politics of maintaining one's cultural traditions in the new country.

That said, I now move to an analysis of *Ije: The Journey* by utilizing fundamental notions from Hamid Naficy's accented cinema that are crucial to the film's framework. They are: narrative style and technique, displacement, racial prejudices, journeying, and border crossing. The features are common generic conventions of accented cinema. I will also engage in brief character analyses in relation to the above notions. From the very first sequence that marks Chioma's arrival, there are a series of scenes juxtaposing her arrival at the airport with the incarceration of Anyanwu before the two meet. The juxtaposition of the two scenes is emblematic of the claustrophobia that often punctuates accented cinema. The narrative is built upon the epistolary motif as the film begins with a scene of Anyanwu writing a letter so that we are presented with the various thoughts of Anyanwu in jail. As she writes, we are able to read what she scribbles down on a piece of paper through the transition of images illustrating her moods and thoughts and mimetic actions, which accentuate recorded voiceover motif and narrations. These aspects of the film coincide with Naficy's perspective on "epistolary narratives." In *Ije*, Anyanwu's prompting of Chioma's journey from Nigeria to the United States involves the use of formal materials like the letter and telephone. Epistolary and exile influence one another as "distance and absence drive them both. However, by addressing someone in an epistle, an illusion of presence is created that hovers in the text's interstices."²⁷ Exile and epistolary are

constitutively linked because both are driven by separation, absence, and loss in addition to a desire to bridge these gaps. Epistolary motifs such as letter writing, notes scribbled on a napkin or a sheet of paper, a conversation on the telephone, or a video or an email message show how words function as “a metonymic and metaphoric displacement of desire.”²⁸ The metonymic displacement signifies the presence of absence. Yet, it is precisely the epistolarity embedded in the narrative that structures the form of the film. The letters highlight not only absence but further illuminate points of difference between one’s homeland and the host country.

The epistolary narrative motif brings us to the flashback, yet another motif and formal component of *Ije: The Journey* and the cinema of migration in general. The flashback performs multiple roles ranging from judging memories, nostalgia of childhood pranks, to recalling the tragic massacre of the Igbos in the North. These functions attest to Naficy’s notion that accented filmmakers employ a plethora of styles to drive home their thematic concerns. *Ije: The Journey* illustrates Naficy’s point that accented cinemas “employ open-form and closed-form visual styles such as multilingual, self-reflexive, and critically juxtaposing narrative structures, amphibolic, doubled crossed and lost characters.”²⁹ In this way, the viewer can see how the form of the film is structured by its content and thematic concerns; it is precisely because the protagonist is removed from his or her homeland that the flashback is integrated into the film so as to demonstrate this loss and longing.

A key feature of accented cinema is that life in exile is defined by a sense of confinement and control, whereas life in one’s homeland is nostalgically delivered and represented as timeless, while emphasizing the natural landscape or other sites of emotional attachment. Anyanwu is controlled and confined to the space of her lover’s mansion, then is subsequently confined in the space of a jail cell. Almost all the US scenes take place inside, while most of the Nigerian scenes are outside. The scenes in America are often dark, while the African ones are bright and colored by the natural landscape. Throughout the narrative there are flashbacks to her youth in Nigeria, where the space is often cast as idyllic. To be sure, the flashbacks are not uniformly nostalgic longings for the past. One scene where Anyanwu and Chioma are playing is quickly undercut by a scene of rebel violence.

Several flashbacks enhance our understanding of how the film bears out Naficy’s point regarding the formal dimensions of accented cinema. The present is juxtaposed against the past, and life in Nigeria is compared to that in the United States. A few flashback sequences bring to the fore the strong bonds between the sisters. This is why Moodley’s theory that films made in the diaspora engage in dialogues between the homeland and foster societies of the filmmakers is an attractive means of analysis. Anyanwu’s precarious experience following the murder of her husband fills her with regret for deciding to leave Nigeria in the first place.

Anyanwu felt a sense of satisfaction because she fulfilled her dreams of becoming a singer in the United States. She is reminded of her attempts at

singing while she was a child back in Nigeria and reflects on her childhood days when she would sneak out of the house at night to join the other children at a bonfire to sing to their delight, only to be met by the disapproval of her patriarchal father. Her longing for home begins to dawn on her, not because she wishes to return home, but because she is reminded of the peace she missed so much, which is highlighted by the hardship of her implication in a crime in the United States. This is highlighted forcefully through the juxtaposition of a scene of her alone in a jail cell with a scene of her outside engaging in the communal activity of farming in Nigeria. This experience is steeped in “displacement.” As people who come to terms with displacement firsthand, transnational filmmakers are capable of producing ambiguities and doubts about the absolutes, and ignored values and norms both of the home and host societies. This phenomenon only makes them capable of transforming their own individual or cultural romance in order to create something of a syncretic narrative, which is also fundamental to *Ije*.

The subject of racial prejudice is significant to immigrant experiences as displayed in the case of Anyanwu and is a common genre convention taken up by accented cinemas. Anyanwu’s relationship with Americans (including her husband) highlights this. For instance, Mrs. Baron, who initially takes up the case, does not envisage a chance for her client, “an African immigrant,” to find justice in court. What one senses from the deadpan speeches of Mrs. Baron during her discussion with Chioma is simply a neglect of moral duty to a fellow human being who resides in the diaspora. This form of racial tension and subtlety attests to what Naficy describes as the “Chronotopes of Life in Exile.”³⁰ In this specific circumstance the accented filmmaker, while trying to illustrate this racial factor, adopts a “chronotopical representation of life in exile and diaspora, which is generally the opposite of that of the homeland.” This fearful, risky, and havoc-wreaking phenomenon “stresses claustrophobia and temporality, cathected to sites of confinement and to narratives of panic.”³¹ The close-up scenes of Anyanwu in jail, for instance, delineate psychological and traumatic stress as a result of migration.

In addition to the facts that describe Anyanwu’s precarious and dehumanizing experiences, her prosecutor, Mr. Henry Disico, also metes out racial and psychological prejudices against her. Mr. Henry Disico is sketched by Chineze Anyaene as an example of a self-righteous racist who sees nothing good about the “black” or “colored” woman. This is why Jerry Turner, a black American lawyer, accuses Henry Disico of caustically implicating his African-immigrant client for a crime she committed based on “self-defence.” For Jerry, Henry’s bias against the accused is born out of racist notions as he paints Anyanwu as an opportunist who kills her white American husband in an act of ingratitude. Henry’s opinion lacks substance. The truth, however, is gleaned from the lips of Mrs. Caroline Vasquez, yet another immigrant who suffers racial prejudices.

Anyanwu’s predicament demonstrates that the migrant remains (not by choice but by the circumstances in which he or she finds himself or herself), a stranger different from those whose society he or she inhabits. She finds

herself in a liminal position, a guest who is not destined to become a member in the host society. Therefore, she is often likely to experience a feeling of uneasiness because of the ambiguity of her situation in structural and temporal terms. With this consciousness in mind, the accented figure, the migrant, and exilic individuals are at risk. Naficy captures the vulnerability thus:

a type of choiceless deterritorialization and reterritorialization that breed pessimism and paranoia. And once emplaced in the new society, they often have to put up with the xenophobia and racism—usually colored by a history of imperial, colonial, or neo-colonial relations between original and host countries. Because of these deep-seated differences, Third World accented filmmakers in the First World do not feel welcome and thus may be suspicious of the freedoms and possibilities that either exilic interstitiality or full integration promises. This in turn intensifies their critical dystopia and outsiderism, as evidenced by the inscription of phobic spaces and liminal panics in their films.³²

Anyanwu's husband also embodies racist ideals. Michael Michino's character is a cruel figure without a moral compass. He is irresponsible and uncontrollably decadent. He disrespects Anyanwu and sees her merely as a sex object to be used and discarded. He also allows his cohorts to have sex with her at will, highlighting his immorality. Such a marriage may not be taken or considered a serious one, from the point of view of those who see marriage as a sacred bond between two people. In the film's context, possibly because Michael Michino considers Anyanwu inferior as a result of her blackness, he treats her badly.

Naficy locates journeying and border crossing as constitutive features of accented cinema, and these characteristics are present in *Ije*. As the film shows, the rigors of traveling and crossing borders are constitutive of black immigrant life. For Anyanwu, the United States is a dreamland to visit and reside in, but her experiences abroad make her wish she had not made that decision to migrate. Chioma, on the other hand, decides to stay back in Nigeria because she has no reason to immigrate. A few scenes reveal Chioma's experiences in the plane and at the airport and the hostilities that follow at these spaces. For instance, on the plane a flight attendant sternly reminds Chioma to fasten her seat belt, and during the security screening upon her arrival, American officials obnoxiously ask to check her several times, much to her chagrin. The film highlights racial insensitivity and politics that come with these sorts of experiences.

According to Naficy, journeying and border crossing, taxis, hotels, strange homes, suitcases, lonely streets, prisons, tunnels, seaport, and airports are "transitional and transnational places and spaces" that constitute the exile's sojourn into the territory of the unknown and are "frequently inscribed in the accented films."³³ *Ije* is replete with elements of travel, traveling aesthetics, and traveling identity as it is also deeply involved in matters of territory and boundaries. By making the decision to stay in Nigeria, Chioma represents for the

homeland a signifying trope, which “emphasize boundless and timeless, and is cathected by means of fetishization and nostalgic longing to the homeland’s natural landscape, mountains, monuments, and souvenirs.”³⁴ On the other hand, Anyanwu signifies the opposite—a life in the diaspora, representing that which tends “to stress claustrophobia and temporality, and it is cathected to sites of confinement and control and to narratives of panic and pursuit.”³⁵ Unfortunately for Anyanwu, her pursuit is marred by Michael’s maliciousness, selfishness, and irresponsibility. Aware of this, Anyanwu had to play along due to her dislocation and fear of the unknown. It dawns on her rather too late that her sojourn ended in shambles long before the horrific night.

Accented New Nollywood: Acting Thirdly in Exile and in the Diaspora

The nonwhite characters found a way to assist themselves in spite of racism so that the freedom Anyanwu regains is a freedom for all. Chioma makes a journey from Nigeria to the United States just to help her sister without knowing how, except for the fact that she is hopeful of Anyanwu’s eventual release. A black American, Jerry Turner, takes up a case he had earlier rejected and manages to successfully see it through to the end in spite of a previous heavy defeat. A willful Caroline Vasquez is located to help with some significant information about the murder, contributing significantly to Anyanwu’s release. Taken together, Anyanwu’s journey is divided into a three-part schema: the departure from her homeland to the United States; her displacement as well as the murder that led to her indictment; and finally her victory in court. The other victims in the film—the other minority characters—share in the tripartite journey, especially the last portion, as they help Anyanwu regain her freedom. By emerging victorious, Anyanwu’s character helps the accented filmmaker, as well as migrants in host nations, see themselves as part of such societies and have a sense of belonging and a right to live in the United States, a country that supposedly upholds the principles of human and civil rights.

Ije: The Journey clearly illustrates New Nollywood’s representation of exilic lives and their experience of being caught between worlds. In Anyaene’s film, immigrants, in spite of their unfavorable conditions, still find it important to form bonds in the diaspora. Consistent with exilic or diasporic films, which explore “an aesthetic response to displacement,”³⁶ *Ije* makes sure to foreground African/Nigerian specificities such as the use of the Igbo language, worldview, and idiosyncrasies as the characters move between worlds and value systems. One’s impression about Chineze Anyaene is that she is very keen on making narratives that resonate deeply with the experiences of African people abroad. Her sojourn to the United States of America was motivated by a desire to obtain an education in the art of making films. However, this pursuit will always come with its challenges, among them racial problems, which cannot be avoided. Although we do not see the authorial figure of the filmmaker

among the characters in the films, it is very possible that she may have had some experiences particular to Anyanwu or Chioma, or a slice of both. To be sure, Chineze Anyaene's return to Nigeria at the end of her study makes her less of a migrant and complicates the diasporic positionality and location of accented filmmakers, yet the dialogues between the homeland and the host country in her film, as well as the formal strategies of navigating the challenges of a new environment and the longing for home, qualify *Ije* as marked by the currents of accented cinema. Unfortunately, after the production of *Ije*, and upon returning to Nigeria after her education, Chineze Anyaene has yet to make another film. Perhaps that may be connected to the financial losses she experienced after making *Ije*, which was pirated.

Notes

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8. Ibid., 23.
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10. Ibid., 3.
11. Ibid., 4.
12. Hamid Naficy, *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media, and the Politics of Place* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 34.
13. Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 5.
14. Sophie Samyn, "Nollywood Made in Europe," in *Global Nollywood: The Transnational Dimensions of an African Video Film Industry*, ed. Mathias Krings and Onookome Okome (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 101.
15. Adeshina Afolayan, *Auteuring Nollywood: Critical Perspectives on The Figurine* (Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press, 2014), XIII.
16. Moradewun Adejunmobi, "Neoliberal Rationalities in Old and New Nollywood," *African Studies Review* 58, no. 3 (2015), 32.
17. Babatunde Onikoyi, "October 1 dir by Kunle Afolayan (Review)," *African Studies Review* 59, no. 1 (2015): 234
18. Afolayan, *Auteuring Nollywood*, 26.
19. Haynes, "New Nollywood," 53.
20. Connor Ryan, "New Nollywood: A Sketch of Nollywood's Metropolitan New Style," *African Studies Review* 58, no. 3 (2015): 56.
21. Haynes, "The Nollywood Diapora," 73.
22. Jonathan Haynes, *Nollywood: The Creation of Nigerian Film Genres* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 237.
23. Ibid., 219.
24. Ibid., 238.
25. Subeshini Moodley, "Postcolonial Feminisms Speaking through an 'Accented Cinema': The Construction of Indian Women in the Films of Mina Nairand Deepa Mehta," *Agenda* 58, no. 3 (2003): 66.
26. Ibid., 67.
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28. Ibid., 101.
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34. Ibid., 5.
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Migrations and Representations

The Cinema of Griot Dani Kouyaté

Daniela Ricci

This chapter analyzes how contemporary diasporic black African filmmakers deal with the issues of representation, migration, and plural cultural affiliations. Since Ousmane Sembène's 1966 *La noire de . . .* (Black girl . . .), one of the first sub-Saharan African films, migration has been a central issue in African cinema. In this chapter, I demonstrate how migration is a source of inspiration, both as the subject of their films and as a lived experience that migrant diasporic filmmakers draw on to create their films. I argue that migration, a physical dislocation, can become a metaphorical, perceptive, and ontological movement, as well as a change in position that allows a new view, a shift in one's identity that transforms vision and shapes narratives. By simply crossing a border, one's subjectivity and cultural affiliation shifts. The dislocation shifts the migrant's gaze and its focal point, changing distances, perspectives, and creating new subjectivities. This decentering gives diasporic filmmakers a new dynamic multiaxial perspective to incorporate into their films.

To explore how migrant sensibility operates in film, I analyze four features by Dani Kouyaté. Three of the films are fictional dramas: *Keïta! l'héritage du griot* (Keïta! The heritage of the griot, 1995),¹ *Sia, le rêve du python* (Sia, the dream of the python, 2001),² and *Medan Vi Lever* (While we live, 2016). In addition to these dramatic films I also interrogate Kouyaté's documentary *Souvenirs encombrants d'une femme de ménage* (Burdening memories of a cleaning lady, 2008).³ This corpus will help us appreciate how his work is derived from the assembly of different filmic components indebted to cultural hybridity, stemming from Kouyaté's diasporic upbringing.

Filming from Elsewhere: Migration and New “Interpretative Frames”

Without denying the very personal aspects of artistic subjectivity, I show how these films arise from the condition of migrancy and from cultural hybridity that migration produces. Kouyaté’s films can be seen as “accented” following Hamid Naficy’s definition. As the Iranian critic argues, the filmmaker’s background is crucial to the production of accented cinema as many films are in part inspired by lived experience, at both personal and collective levels. Kouyaté’s cinema dramatizes what Hamid Naficy argues concerning diasporic filmmakers standing in the interstices of cultures: “As partial, fragmented, and multiple subjects, these filmmakers are capable of producing ambiguity and doubt about the taken-for-granted values of their home and host societies.”⁴ *Souvenirs encombrants* and *Medan Vi Lever* deal directly with migration, while in his earlier films (*Keïta! L’héritage du griot* and *Sia, le rêve du python*), migration is more recognizable through the positionality of the filmmaker from where he can observe his original society with a certain distance.

Kouyaté is strongly aware of the need of one’s own roots and ancestral values, but he looks at his traditions in relative terms by questioning cultural practices and habits in the light of other forms of knowledge and possibilities acquired through the migratory experience. Migrants can stay in a nostalgic, separate universe, try to assimilate into the new environment, or be open to cultural exchange. If migrants accept the challenge of complexity, they are compelled to continually “negotiate” their identity⁵ within the new sociocultural framework. The space of migration becomes a new “interpretative frame,”⁶ allowing for the overcoming of monolithic and predefined ideas, producing what Taiye Selasi referred to in “Bye Bye Barbar” as “multidimensional thinking.” As Selasi and Chambers argue, migrancy places people in a condition of belonging to many cultures, at the “intersection of histories and memories.”⁷ Chambers further points out how migrants balance multiplicity of cultures, allowing them to draw on a range of cultural references. The ideas of fixed culture, or of a pre-given unchanging culture, are no longer valid because cultures are constantly being reinvented. This is what Dani Kouyaté does in his cinema, proposing new possibilities through the transformation of the characters and situations, as I stress throughout this chapter.

Migration is not just about territorial and cultural positioning but also about ways of thinking and its effects on one’s subjectivity. In Dani Kouyaté’s world, “You cannot talk about films in geographical terms, but in terms of point of view.”⁸ Artistic works are products, forged by the filmmaker’s experiences and cultural habitus. As Pierre Sorlin asserts, the artist “talks from the place he occupies in the world [. . .] what he tries to express is grounded in his particular experience.”⁹ Kouyaté affirms: “My reality is a cultural melting pot, and I must assume this reality, this mixture, even in my films.”¹⁰ The narratives

and the forms, then, of Kouyaté's films reflect his migratory path. For example, they show complexity and plurality, a multiplicity of languages, narrators, points of view, inside and outside areas, and various diegetic levels (*Keïta*). The editing constantly crosses times and ages (*Keïta*), spaces (*Souvenirs* and *Medan Vi Lever*), putting different generations and cultures in dialogue, employing different kinds of music and imageries. The characters carry out personal and social transformations.

Dani Kouyaté's Personal and Artistic Path

It is worth recalling Dani Kouyaté's biography in order to better appreciate his work. His life is marked by dislocation, cultural plurality, and complexity. He was born in Bobo Dioulasso, in the south of Burkina Faso, to an age-old family of griots. There, as he recounts, he received a dual education: he learned "Cartesian" culture from the modern (read: Western) school and at the same time received a traditional education from his father, the well-known griot and actor Sotigui Kouyaté.¹¹ These two waves of intellectual influence nourish his artistic creation. While he was still young he moved to the capital, Ouagadougou, to enter the African Institute of Film Studies (INAFEC). Afterwards, he continued his training in France, where he obtained degrees in cultural and social animation, anthropology, and in film studies at the University of Paris Sorbonne and Paris 8-Saint Denis. His training was thus pluralistic. After many years in France, he moved further into another linguistic and cultural universe: Sweden. Every time he moved, he was confronted with new cultural practices; this has also encouraged him to make syncretic works, mixing different sources of inspiration and experimentation. A polyvalent artist, griot, director of theater, television, and cinema (fiction and documentary), he started by making short films.¹² He later directed a TV series.¹³ His theatrical experience has also been enriched by the fact that he stages plays by African and European playwrights. He deterritorializes his subjects, creating something new, to convey his own particular point of view, and to share his interrogations with the audience. He staged the 2012 play *Ombre d'espoir* written by the Congolese playwright Wilfried N'Sondé. The play dramatizes the migration of Moussa, an African, to Europe. He also staged *Le prodige de Nora*, from the classic *A Doll's House* (*Et Dukkehjem*) by the Norwegian Henrik Johan Ibsen, with an entirely African troupe. Kouyaté has even transposed Dario Fo's *Non si Paga! Non si paga* (Can't pay! Won't pay), an Italian play, to a Burkinabe setting in support of labor struggles.

However, it is in film that he found the best way to practice the griot function. As he claims, "cinema is a fabulous tool for a griot."¹⁴ This is because cinema is an art constructed out of many aesthetic phenomena, a synthesis of various artistic elements. Like the griot's narration, film is based on different performances: oral and visual performances—voice, song, body, and oratory—which proceed with figurative images. Dani Kouyaté's cinema is rich in proverbs and aphorisms. This is also a way to signify allegory and metaphor,

since proverbs carry certain truths, told in an implicit or shifted manner, and they have to be interpreted by the viewer. This is also connected to the typical griotic narrative art, characterized by allegorical images liable to awaken the viewer's imagination. In this sense, orality and the capacity to imagine are central in the cinema of the griot-filmmaker Dani Kouyaté. This aspect is especially well represented in *Keïta! L'héritage du griot* through the epiphanic revelations of the young Mabo, able to imagine and "see" the oral mythical tale told by the griot.

As a result of his debt to the griot tradition, Kouyaté's films make use of metaphors, images and imagery, carrying an oneiric power. However, we can recognize in the use of metaphors and allegories also an expression of the allegorical tendency typical of Third Cinema.¹⁵ Here allegories and parables become a kind of hermeneutic "deterritorialization," a cognitive displacement. We may consider Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's analysis of the use of allegory in Third Cinema, or Mike Wayne's, or Teshome Gabriel's. All of them stress that allegory is a habitual figure in Third Cinema, to hint at something bigger than a single destiny, so the characters become part of a larger environment. It is also used "to express ideas and senses that cannot be articulated in conceptual terms. Yet, it is worth remembering that these stories, metaphors, and allegories are theories too," as Gabriel asserts.¹⁶ Past and present can be an allegory of diverse conceptions, between which an equilibrium has to be found.

While Kouyaté's earlier films were situated and shot in West Africa (Burkina Faso and Mali), he later started to film in Europe, to which he migrated. *Souvenirs encombrants* and *Medan Vi Lever* take immigration as the subject of their narratives. Although the films deal with African subjects, their larger significance is relevant to all people, whatever their origins.

Keïta! L'héritage du Griot

His first feature film, *Keïta! L'héritage du griot*, expresses one of his main preoccupations: the place of traditional storytellers in the modern urban context, something with which he is daily confronted.¹⁷ Orality is here predominant. Kouyaté is particularly interested in exploring oral dramaturgies because cinema owes a lot to the technical and dramatic richness of the oral tradition. He makes wide use of dialogues, divinations, oracles, and prophecies. The words can be beautiful and poetic, flattering or subversive. Through orality he calls (both from intradiegetic characters and the spectator) for a deep attentiveness, as Carrieri underlines, concerning *Keïta*.¹⁸ It is indeed emblematic that the griot Djeliba starts his tale, instructing the young Mabo to "open [his] ears and [to] listen carefully." The narration can thus nourish the imagination and dreams, which are frequently evoked through Mabo's mind and eyes.

However, Kouyaté wrote *Keïta* in France, which makes the film also an allegorical reflection on the condition of griots in Europe, where they have to face

other cultural systems. What is their role and what does it mean? *Keïta* is also an allegory of migrants who carry their cultural baggage but are confronted with new cultural habits. The film tells the story of Mabo (Hamed Dicko), a young boy in a contemporary town in West Africa. He goes to a modern (French-style) school, but one day the griot Djeliba Kouyaté (Sotigui Kouyaté)¹⁹ comes to him to teach him his story and the origin of his name so as to connect him with his culture. Mabo is thus confronted with two apparently contradictory systems, one inspired by traditional myths, the other modern but disconnected from the cultural environment. The two educational models resulting from two different visions of the world are confronted.²⁰ As Valérie Thiers-Thiam illustrates, they are visually opposed in various ways. The modern school is located in a closed space; the teaching is done in French, with knowledge transmitted from top to bottom in a mechanic and repetitive manner. The school subjects²¹ are not related to the daily lives of the young pupils. In contrast, the griot's teaching takes place in Bambara, outside, in the garden and near a tree. He tells Mabo his own story in a dynamic situation while often changing place and position. The acquisition of knowledge passes through a real dialogue and requires the pupil's active participation. The two systems are also shot in two different ways: the school pupils are shown in a group in long shots; the scenes with the griot are often shown in close-ups and in shot/reverse shots so the viewer is led to actively engage the film and to be close to the characters.²²

The tension between the two educational methods generates conflict in the world of the adults, who are rigid in their positions and impervious to dialogue. Mabo represents the younger generation who desire a synthesis between the two worlds, and his final utterance in the epilogue discloses this desire: "I want to go to school, but I want the story to continue." The entire film illustrates a variety of subjective truths. The truth of the griot, for instance, differs from that of the schoolteacher. Neither the "assimilated" teacher nor the griot is really open to listening to the other one. Kouyaté's vision is far from being simplistic or Manichean as he effectively denounces the downward slide of some griots entranced by power and money. For example, during a wedding party, a woman griot sings about the honor of a family in exchange for money.²³

The film leaves the ending open, entrusting the viewers with the task of drawing their own conclusions. Furthermore, like other diasporic filmmakers, Kouyaté films from a movable, off-centered, multifocal point of view. This film technique is used to illustrate a variety of points of view and a multiplicity of perspectives. Often reality and imagination mix. Dani Kouyaté explains, "There are no borders between the true and the false. You have to decipher it by yourself. This is the meaning of the fiction."²⁴ For this reason, in *Keïta* we also find a mysterious, sometimes murky, world of divination and predictions to be decoded. This contributes to a complex open vision through the evolution of the characters. This also happens when Mabo tells the story of Sundiata to his friends, in his way. The director explains, "What matters is not the truth of the tale, but its oneiric power [. . .] even if a tale does not allow us to know the truth because something is missing in the plot, it allows us to imagine

and so to grow.”²⁵ Finally, Mabo develops an awareness and watches the world around him in a new way.

The challenge for diasporic filmmakers is adapting cinematographic language to one’s own purposes and to find appropriate forms of representation. Kouyaté’s narratives and aesthetics reveal his syncretic artistic personality, from the griot style to the theatrical scenes concerning his cultural imprint, but also a perpetual crossing of times and spaces, digressions and multilayered narration, which are derived from his migratory experience. *Keïta*, for instance, is built on two diegetic levels: the legendary tale of the Mandingo epic, the story of thirteenth-century Sundiata Keïta told by a griot, and the story of Mabo in the present time. The editing also sets up parallels between the two universes—the rural imaginary mythical world and the urban setting—and two languages: French and Bambara. *Keïta* constantly navigates between past and present, between “reality” and an oneiric universe. The narration is also disrupted by the facts of Mabo’s daily life. The editing brings past and present closer and it deploys a narrative parallelism between the trajectory of Mabo and his ancestor Sundiata Keita: Mabo’s banishment from school coincides with the exile of Sundiata in the griotic tale. Also, the griot narrates only Sundiata’s childhood—in parallel to the present moment of Mabo’s existence—and not the better-known story of his later exploits. In *Keïta*, the epic of *Sundiata Keita* is helpful to the current situation of the young Mabo Keita. He certainly must know his past, but not stay enchained in the traditions. The griot comes precisely to accomplish this mission. So even if the film became a reference for learning about the Sundiata epic, the director’s first interest was to tell the contemporary story of Mabo and to put it in relation to tradition. The use of myth and the past, like its deconstruction in *Sia, le rêve du python*, becomes a metaphorical way to talk about the contemporary world and the negotiation between various cultures, as happens in migration.

Sia, le rêve du python

Sia, le rêve du python is a free adaptation of the legend of Wagadu, a seventh-century Soninke founding myth. According to the myth, every two years the Python God demands the sacrifice of one young girl, the most beautiful virgin, in order to ensure prosperity for the people. The entire tale (except the final scene) is situated in this mythical past. The predestined Sia (Fatoumata Diawara), helped by Kerfa (Hamadoun Kassogué), the “madman,” refuses to submit to this fate. She is initially supported by her fiancé Mamadi (Ibrahim Baba Cissé), the nephew of Wakhané (Sotigui Kouyaté), the head of the king’s army.²⁶ But later he tries to perpetuate the established order, which she opposes. The film is inspired by Moussa Diagana’s theater play *La légende Wagadu vue par Sia Yataber* (The legend of Wagadu seen by Sia Yatabaré). The title itself declares the chosen point of view, suggesting that this is an interpretation and that other perspectives are possible. In this version, the serpent does

not really exist and the priest abuses the young girls. If in *Keïta* past and future are in confrontation, in *Sia* the recollection of the past, through the legend, works as an allegory in itself.

What essentially interested Dani Kouyaté when he saw the play was the author's ability to play on the myth through a modern interpretation. The film is a metaphorical denunciation of the abuse of power even in contemporary society and functions as a universal political fable by developing the political allegory on the relationship between power and mystery. The sense of obscurity and the ambiguity are strengthened by the fact that most of the scenes are dark and set at nighttime. The almost theatrical aesthetic contributes to transposing the viewer in this mythical timeless universe.

In his first two feature films, Kouyaté revisits founding myths in order to offer new epistemologies relevant to contemporary mentalities. In both cases—*Keïta* and *Sia*—Kouyaté took inspiration not only from oral literature, but also from the written adaptation of the Sundiata epic by the Guinean Djibril Tamsir Niane and Moussa Diagana's play *La légende du Wagudu vue par Sia Yatabéré*. Kouyaté thus explains his diasporic positioning: "We are Africans, who are highly conscious of our Africanness, but somehow disconnected from our roots. I often go looking for my roots in books. That's my approach too: to delve into my roots to find the substance that I still need to advance."²⁷

Dani Kouyaté succeeds in also showing the problems internal to African countries, as he affirms about making *Sia*: "I intended to show that the ills of Africa come of course from slavery and colonialism, but also from our founding myths and from the pernicious amount of totalitarianism that they contain."²⁸ As in *Keïta*, he looks with hindsight at the internal contradictions of contemporary Burkinabe society. This critical distance is common to those who have emigrated without severing their roots. In this way, the various cultural systems do not subtract but add to one other. The director thus blends a critical gaze and his insider knowledge to highlight differences and, in the process, explores visions that break the uniformity in Western exogenous representations.

Kouyaté's entire oeuvre operates in a similar fashion with his portrayal of tensions within the family. In *Keïta* the father defends the griot and tradition, while the mother prefers the new culture. In *Sia*'s family, the husband is trapped in the legend, while the wife tries to change the system. The "madman" is another narrative device used to express disagreement in *Sia*. This figure is often present in West African traditional theater too. The "madman" has enormous freedom of opinion and speech. Paradoxically, his words are wise but subversive. He is able to awaken people and to challenge power. "The 'madman' represents the truth, because reality itself is mad," explains the filmmaker.²⁹ He represents the seed of madness, able to enter the interstices, and opening up a new perspective. This helps to avoid sclerotic conservatism, represented by the established power. In *Sia*, Kouyaté goes so far as to bring the madman and the king into direct confrontation in what Olivier Barlet defines as an "anthology sequence."³⁰ In this way, the filmmaker is able to talk directly

to contemporary powers as he affirms, "I tell the powers things that just a griot can say, disguising them."³¹

Both films demonstrate Kouyaté's diasporic positionality. His migratory experience enables him to appreciate his traditional values and roots, but also to question them, trying to renew and update them in order to better understand the present time and imagine a better future. Awareness of the past becomes essential to moving forward. "I am not a blind traditionalist; what interest[s] me is to work with my traditions. I love them, but I am not nostalgic for the past."³² Thus, Kouyaté's films are inhabited by the credo that "the future comes from the past," as the griot Djeliba says to Mabo just before leaving. A similar idea is present in other films.³³ This is an exhortation to stay open to change, to build one's own destiny in connection with the origins, because without roots human beings are lost and cannot really be themselves. It is necessary to know the past in order to better understand the present and invent the future. These two fictional features also demonstrate his critical tendency to absorb the old and the new in creating new subjectivities.

Souvenirs encombrants d'une femme de ménage

After shooting three features in Africa,³⁴ Kouyaté directed a few documentaries. The documentary *Souvenirs encombrants d'une femme de ménage* is Kouyaté's first film shot in France. It is about the vicissitudes of Thérèse Paris Bernis, an old Guadeloupean woman who moved to metropolitan France. Initially, the director was asked to record a theater show she was in,³⁵ but when he met the protagonist, he decided to make a documentary about her because he was so touched by her strength in overcoming the enormous difficulties she had encountered in her life as a migrant. Born in Guadeloupe and a mother of six children from different fathers who all abandoned her, she has fought her whole life against poverty. She came to France, where she led the grueling life of a maid, and was sometimes homeless, yet she pursued a goal: to recount her misfortunes to exorcise them ("I wish to relate my misery, and I'm not ashamed . . ."). She thus wrote an autobiographical book that was discovered by Claire Denieul, a white French woman whom Thérèse looked after when she was a baby. Claire, a theater director, touched by her story, staged a play that weaves together their two voices.

This film also becomes a very significant testimony about contemporary France and its problematic relations with West Indians and other migrants. For example, most of the men she met in Paris were also immigrants, who were from the West Indies or Africa. One was a *tirailleur sénégalais*, evoking another sad and often forgotten chapter of history, linking France and Africa. Meaningfully, the son of the *tirailleur* defines the encounter between his father and Thérèse as "two victims of the system who met." Her story takes on a social and political value as it dramatizes the relationship between France and its former colonies.

This film accomplishes another very important goal of allowing Thérèse the possibility to tell her story once more. This is what has prevented her from madness because identities are built through narration and (personal) narration can be cathartic. She describes the cathartic benefit of telling her story thus: “I don’t want to die before recounting my struggles, miseries, battles, with exactitude. I don’t want to keep them for myself. I want to be free of my fear of the devil, of labor, of weariness.” In addition to the narrative’s function of exorcizing her deep difficulties and sufferings as a migrant, it also becomes a way to reconstruct herself, to rebuild her memory, and to put together the various fragments of her life.

The focal point of the film is based on her telling and singing about her experience of dislocation. Accompanying her memories, the images shot in Guadeloupe are juxtaposed with images of France to showcase the importance of her premigratory life. After a brief and powerful introduction of the protagonist on the stage, she begins a personal, intimate account of remembering her feelings in her last days in Guadeloupe and her first contact with post-war France (in 1951)—the real France, not the dreamed-of one. *Here or there*, depending on the point of view, she became black (“a Nigger,” in her words) and, through the eyes of the Others, she felt unworthy. She was made to feel as “just a Black Woman” whose story did not matter. As she puts it, “I was desperate, and I cried and cried. I was worthless, too low to sweep the floor for the French. We, West Indians, we are immigrants, even if we are not like African immigrants. But African or West Indian immigrants, it’s all the same. Niggers are niggers, jumbled in the same bag.”³⁶ The “people of France” exclude her from French society because of her skin color even though she is French (since Guadeloupe is a French territory) and speaks French.³⁷

Kouyaté’s aesthetics and directing provide a counterpoint to all these misfortunes by showing Thérèse’s strength and dignity. In the film she is shot in close-ups against a black background to showcase her posture and pride. Thus, when we hear and feel her pain, when we see her, we are already touched by her elegance and strength. The camera amplifies her desire to resist, her strength to fight and to stand. Her story ultimately encourages other (migrant) women to go on and to find their own paths.

Medan Vi Lever

Kouyaté’s latest feature film, *Medan Vi Lever*, is shot in both Sweden—where he currently lives—and Gambia. The location of *Medan Vi Lever* is dictated by the story of the protagonist, and there is a clear choice for this narrative to be based on migration, with an international cast of African and European actors. The film utilizes Swedish and English, neither being the director’s mother tongue. The making of the film is a good example of intercultural dialogue, since the artistic and technical team is very international, and worked together in Sweden as well as in Gambia. It is an urban movie with an aesthetic style that

is different from the previous ones. The photography, in both indoor and outdoor locations, strongly contrast colors, and is delivered in a more realist style. The film shows more close-ups than usual and the editing gives a faster rhythm to the film. The soundtrack—mostly intradiegetic—is syncretic; the plot takes place in the present, yet moves from Sweden to Gambia.

Medan Vi Lever is the story of Ibrahim, called Ibbe (Adam Kanyama), a young mixed-race musician, born and living in Sweden with his Gambian mother Kandhia (Josette Bushell-Mingo) after the premature death of his Swedish father. He is integrated into Swedish life; his rap pervades the movie, alternating or mixing with traditional West African melodies. When his producer tries to change Ibbe's lyrics (which are clearly inspired by his life) because they are not light and positive enough for the intended audience, Ibbe has a deep identity crisis as he feels that part of his experience and himself are denied by Swedish society.

Ibbe also has a profound relationship with a maternal "uncle" (Richard Seruwagi)—an African immigrant whom Kandhia helped when he arrived in Sweden—and his paternal grandparents (Stern Ljunggren and Marika Lindström). He searches for his identity through his rap. This is similar to *Rage*,³⁸ a film in which a mixed-race boy, living in London with his English mother after the death of his father, seeks to find himself through music. We also find a similar situation in Haile Gerima's 2008 *Teza*. Teodross, the protagonist, is born in Germany to a German woman and an Ethiopian immigrant who has since left Germany to go back to fight for his country. Teodross similarly tries to find his peace in music.³⁹

These films highlight another crucial aspect of migration: the second generation—the sons and daughters of immigrants. While immigrants have to fight to find themselves, as we see with Thérèse in *Souvenirs*, these young mixed-race characters have to fight harder, precisely because of their double racial and cultural heritage. The fact that all the mixed-race characters in the films cited here are from single-parent families represents the struggle they have to undertake to recognize themselves. Art seems to be the best way for the expression of this reconstruction.

In *Medan Vi Lever*, while Ibbe is in the midst of crisis, his mother Kandhia, torn by other existential questions, decides to go back "home" to Banjul in order to rediscover who she is and what she wants. We know that Kandhia has a good job and good friends in Sweden. She belongs to there, but this does not protect her from some awkward comments about Gambia. For example, one of her patients commiserates, presuming that in Gambia there must be a war, like everywhere in Africa. Later, he suggests that Kandhia should talk in "Gambish" to her son. When a colleague tries to explain to him that "Gambish" does not mean anything, he corrects himself with "Gambian." These ironic scenes underline the Swedish, and more generally European, ignorance of other histories and how migrants can feel unappreciated. Shortly afterwards, Ibrahim joins her in Gambia.⁴⁰

Finally, the mother, who was supposed to remain in Gambia, goes back "home" to Sweden, while Ibrahim, whose visit is supposed to be temporary,

stays behind where he seems to have found his place. Kandhia's positionality questions the notion of *home*, which, for migrants, can be fluctuating. As Sara Ahmed states, home "is more than one place."⁴¹ Avtar Brah distinguishes the desire of homeland to the "home desiring."⁴² In fact, migration marks people's lives, creating a "before" and an "after," a "here" and "there." But with time, the "here" and the "there" can be reversed and a new place can become home. Those who live between different places, at certain moments, can confuse "coming" and "going." As Avtar Brah suggests, "home" is the place where daily life is.⁴³ "A tree puts down its roots there where it stands," as it is said in the film.⁴⁴

Ibbe plays in a band with the fiancé of his cousin, Ismael, a talented singer and kora player. He thus makes syncretic music, combining his experience and his style with Ismael's more traditional one. Kouyaté also shows the "reverse shot": Ibbe is a sort of immigrant in Gambia, bringing his experience and at the same time learning from the local people. This can also be read as an allegorical fable of the opportunities of migration for both the immigrants and the local people who encounter them. Again, art, like cinema, can be a very favorable way to meet.

In Gambia, we also witness a council of the elders, consulted at Kandhia's suggestion—she being the person returning from abroad with a fresh viewpoint—about the marriage of Ibbe's cousin to Ismael, a musician. Here again, the sage recalls the traditions, but at the same time, he recognizes that times have changed, and so the council's decisions have to adapt to the present time without repudiating the past. Through the figure of Ismael, whom Kandhia manages to view with a certain distance, she changes her attitude toward her son. Previously she objected to his choice of being a musician, but in Banjul she starts to support him. In *Medan Vi Lever* the journeys between the two countries and two continents also become an intimate trip, not only on the part of the young artist in search of himself but also on Kandhia's part.⁴⁵

Open Ends and the Implication of the Viewer

Dani Kouyaté's films, like those by other diasporic directors, end with an open finale. Manthia Diawara argues that griots rely on narratives of disorder and subsequent restoration. African filmmakers tend to move beyond tradition by creating a new order.⁴⁶ Diawara writes, "the function of oral narrative is used less to achieve a traditional/nostalgic closure, and more to enunciate a new narrative, posing the conditions of resistance to traditional order and a creation of a new one."⁴⁷ This opens the way to a revolutionary transformation because, as bell hooks asserts, "to imagine is to begin the process that transforms reality."⁴⁸

The open ends allow the viewer to freely interpret. Kouyaté's cinema succeeds in raising questions and invites the viewers to find solutions and to shape their own truths. Thus, through the exposition of the multiplicity of

subjectivities and truths, the viewer is called to actively play his or her hermeneutic role. On this question, Anjali Prabhu discusses the “interpellation” of the spectator, recalling Althusser. She underlines how the spectator is interpellated by the experience of the film, “drawing on models of being whose configurations go well beyond the sensory experience of the film.”⁴⁹ She continues: “*interpellation* becomes more dynamic and the relationship between spectator-subject and screen-subject dialectical.”⁵⁰ In this sense, each viewer has to recompose and interpret the story and form his or her own opinions.

Medan Vi Lever, *Keïta*, and *Sia* end with open finales. *Medan Vi Lever* closes with the beginning of Ibbe’s new life in Banjul and his mother’s new life in Sweden. We do not know how their lives will turn out. *Keïta* ends with the departure of the griot. Having realized the confusion he brought into the community, he disappears, leaving his story unfinished. But he has accomplished his mission: to ignite the desire to know his own story in Mabo, who has to find the rest of the story by himself. *Sia* ends with the protagonist’s refusal to become queen and participate in maintaining power. She decides not to follow her fiancé, who has undermined the former authority, but instead of changing the system, simply takes his place by living the same lies. The true revolt resides in Sia’s refusal to perpetrate the same order. In the last scene, she walks a paved street in a contemporary African town.⁵¹ She has taken on Kerfa’s madness, who was eliminated by the rulers because he told uncomfortable truths. Having become mad in turn, she takes on his role. Repeating the same sentences Kerfa said at the beginning, Sia alerts people to the danger of blindly following tradition and validating lies. She encourages people to rise up against the abuses of power. It is also symbolically important that madness passes from the older man to the younger woman. In a largely sexist society, this can be seen as an optimistic opening for the future. The fact that this last scene takes place in contemporary times is significant in a film in which the director uses the past and legend to talk about the present condition.

It is significant in this respect that spectators in Burkina Faso see the authorities’ murder of Kerfa (who was like most of the people telling the truth and fighting for freedom) as an allegory of the real murder of the journalist Norbert Zongo on December 13, 1998, in Burkina Faso. The filmmaker explains that it was not his direct intention, but he is happy the audience makes the analogy: “I didn’t want to make a film about this affair because my preoccupation is universal. [. . .] Anyone can interpret the film as he wants. [. . .] Cinema allows you to be smarter than censorship, thanks to metaphor. The viewers follow: they can read between lines.”⁵² The viewer indeed has to take on the responsibility of interpreting the story. This is made explicit at the beginning of *Sia*, when a voice-over asks, “The legend tells us that once upon a time, the empire offered its most beautiful girls to the Python-God in return for prosperity. . . . But, where today does our story unfold? In which time? Jean Cocteau said: *Legends have the privilege of being ageless*. So it is as you please.” The viewer is thus called to participate, to react, and to take a position. However, he or she is also encouraged to imagine optimistic developments, thanks to the transformation

processes initiated by the main characters. *Keïta* and *Sia* indeed almost have a cyclical narrative structure. However, their endings do not correspond exactly to the beginnings: in the first, the griot goes back to where he came from, but he has accomplished his mission and triggered Mabo's curiosity to go in search of his story. The second film opens and closes with the mad Kerfa/Sia walking in the street,⁵³ hurling anathemas and aphorisms at the people, but Sia took on Kerfa's role and the seeds of transformation are planted. The characters resist and try to change the given social order to establish better conditions. This is not just for themselves, but for all the people—for the community.

From the foregoing, we can see how the migratory positionality of the filmmaker is emblematic of the transformation processes we observe in his films but also of a plurality of possibilities and complexities. The films by Dani Kouyaté show the possibilities of cultural *métissage*, one of the biggest opportunities of migrancy. He portrays an existential quest, a perpetual preoccupation of finding a synthesis out of various belongings, cultures, heritages, memories, between here and there, past and present, traditions and future, in a never-ending process. The aesthetic is also syncretic, influenced by orality and griotic narration, and modern cinema. The films suggest that one can stay connected to one's roots, while at the same time being open to others. On this question Kouyaté states, "My father often used to say: when you look carefully in someone's eyes you find yourself. You mustn't lose yourself in other's eyes; you must find yourself in them."⁵⁴ This also reflects his personal experience. Dani Kouyaté indeed stays connected to his roots "because if not, you cut yourself off from the sap that feeds you."⁵⁵ As Paul Gilroy suggests, it is simultaneously about *roots* and *routes*.⁵⁶

Migration and dislocation inhabit the examined movies, like those by other diasporic filmmakers, at different levels. Migration becomes a subject of the film as is the case in *Souvenirs encombrants* and *Medan Vi Lever*. As a lived experience, migration is capable not only of forging visions and narratives, but also of providing a critical look at contemporary societies (as in *Keïta* and *Sia*). The diasporic position enables filmmakers to challenge conventional representations and established systems, opening up new epistemologies and new perspectives for the future. Moreover, the strength of Dani Kouyaté's cinema is based on a fruitful mix of theoretical thoughts and personal experiences that enrich the narrative, encouraging people to find new syncretic equilibrium.

Notes

1. Les Productions de la Lanterne (France), Sahelis Productions (Burkina Faso), 94 min.

2. Les Productions de la Lanterne (France), Sahelis Productions (Burkina Faso), 96 min. Presented at FESPACO 2001, the film won various awards, including the Special Jury Prize, the European Union Prize/ACP Prize (Africa,

Caribbean, Pacific), the UEMOA Special Features Award, the OCIC Award, the INALCO Award, and the Hamilton Award.

3. Les Productions de la Lanterne, 52 min.

4. Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 12.

5. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Cultures* (London: Routledge, 1994); Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 392–401.

6. Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996), 16.

7. Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (London: Routledge, 1994), 6.

8. Olivier Barlet, *Les cinémas d'Afrique des années 2000. Perspectives critiques* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2012), 51.

9. Pierre Sorlin, "Quelqu'un à qui parler," in *Politique des auteurs et théories de cinéma*, ed. Jean-Pierre Esquenazi (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003), 162.

10. Eva Jørholt, "Africa's Modern Cinematics Griots," in *Same and Other: Negotiating African Identity in Cultural Production*, ed. Mai Palmberg and Maria Eriksson Baaz (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2001), 97.

11. Dani Kouyaté, "Interview," in *Le griot, le psychanalyste et le cinéma africain*, ed. Pierre-Georges Despierre (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004), 141.

12. *Bilakoro* (1989); *Tobbere Kossam* (Milk dust, 1991); *Les larmes sacrées du crocodile* [The crocodile's sacred tears, 1993].

13. *A nous la vie* [To us!, 1998].

14. Dani Kouyaté, home page, June 2015, <http://www.dani-kouyate.com/index.php>.

15. Third Cinema is an aesthetic and political project, born at the end of the 1960s in Latin America, but with tri-continental influences (Latin America, Asia, and Africa). It combines the struggles of political and cultural liberation in search of a form free of conventional standards. The term *Third* reflects the so-called Third World, but also means a response to the dominant cinematic forms of "First" commercial cinema and "Second" cinema, a form of individualistic auteur cinema. It symbolizes the desire to find a new way.

16. Teshome Gabriel, *Third Cinema Updated: Exploration of Nomadic Aesthetics and Narrative Communities*, Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.<http://teshomegabriel.net/third-cinema-updated>.

17. It is important to stress that as Kouyaté often says, being a griot is not just a family heritage, but is the intentional will to take on this role (see Dani Kouyaté, "Etre griot aujourd'hui: difficultés et enjeux," in *Identités assignées, identités choisies: constructions et représentations*, ed. Thomas Cepitel, Thierno Dia, and Daniela Ricci, forthcoming).

18. Giuseppe Carrieri, *Le voci del silenzio. Scene dal cinema dei cantastorie africani* (Milan: Bietti Heterotopia, 2011), 76.

19. The fact that this character is played by the griot Sotigui Kouyaté (the father of the filmmaker) gives more emphasis to the role. The filmmaker indeed wrote *Keïta* for him.

20. Other films deal with this issue. *Sango Malo* (Bassek Ba Kobhio, Cameroun, 1991) is a reflection on the education system and traditional values, where speech and humor have their place. In *Vacances au pays/Trip to the Country* (documentary, 2000), Jean Marie Teno questions the “annihilation” perpetrated by the educational system through a process of hierarchizing of cultures (<http://www.raphia.fr/films/vacances.html>).

21. They study Darwinian theory, according to which the ancestors come from gorillas (and not from the mythic Mandingo kingdom). In the modern school they do not learn about their culture and their history.

22. Valérie Thiers-Thiam, *À chacun son griot, Le mythe du griot narrateurs dans la littérature et le cinéma de l'Afrique de l'Ouest* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004), 153.

23. It is interesting to note that a conniving griot is also present in *Guimba* (Omar Cheick Sissoko, Mali, 2004), a film on the abuse of power and injustice under dictatorship. Here, the griot is completely subjugated to the powers, singing the praises of the king for his own personal gain, becoming a kind of buffoon and losing his original function.

24. Barlet, *Les cinémas d'Afrique*, 53.

25. Quoted in Carrieri, *Le voci del silenzio*, 78; author's translation from Italian.

26. It is interesting to note that here Sotigui Kouyaté plays Wakhane, the head of the army, a role that is very different from the “wise man” roles that we are used to seeing him play.

27. *Creation in Exile*, dir. Daniela Ricci, 36' 06"–36' 29" min.

28. Vital Philippot, “Entretien avec Dani Kouyaté à propos de ‘Sia, le rêve du python,’” January 2002, <http://www.dani-kouyate.com/fr/presse/sia020115>.

29. Barlet, *Les cinémas d'Afrique*, 167.

30. *Ibid.*, 168.

31. Kouyaté, *Le griot, le psychanaliste et le cinéma africain*, 140–41.

32. Kouyaté, *Sia, le rêve du python* (Paris: Médiathèque des Trois Mondes).

33. See, for example, *Niaye* (Sembène Ousmane, 1964), *Taafe Fanga* (Adama Drabo, 1997), *Heritage Africa!* (Kwaw P. Ansah, 1989), and *Sankofa* (Haile Gerima, 1993).

34. In addition to *Keïta* and *Sia*, Kouyaté made *Ouaga Saga* (2004).

35. The theater play *Etre noire* (Being black) is based on the story of Thérèse, performed by herself. The synopsis says: “French but black, free but a descendant of slaves, Christian but marked by the history of witchcraft, this is her legacy” (Kouyaté, *Souvenirs*, <http://www.africine.org/?menu=film&no=7938>; author's translation). This highlights the contradictions and complexities emblematic in migrancy.

36. *Souvenirs*, 12' 41"–13' 03".

37. *Ibid.*, 13' 16".

38. Newton I. Aduaka, 2000.

39. See Daniela Ricci, *Cinémas des diasporas noires: esthétiques de la reconstruction* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2016), 89–110 and 190.

40. At the same time, Ibbe rediscovers the maternal country. This recalls the character of Thierno in *Des étoiles* (Under the starry sky; Dyana Gaye, 2013). Born in the United States, Thierno lives with his Senegalese immigrant mother and goes to Senegal for the first time to bury his nearly unknown father. This film also puts migration and belonging at the center of the narration. See Daniela Ricci, "Film Review: Des étoiles de Dyana Gaye." *African Studies Review* 58, no. 2 (2015): 281–83.

41. Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000), 77.

42. Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, 93.

43. *Ibid.*, 192.

44. Here Kouyaté makes an interesting use of proverbs. Earlier he made Knadhia say that "No matter how long a log stays in the *river*, it does not become a *crocodile*." *The two expressions seem contradictory*, but effectively this is the expression of the fact that belonging can change.

45. Often a physical journey allegorically signifies an interior quest, as we can see in other diasporic films, such as, for instance, *Kinshasa Palace* (Zeka Lapline, DRC/France, 2006), *Notre étrangère* (Sarah Bouyain, Burkina Faso, France, 2001), and *Le fleuve* and *L'absence* (Mama Keita, Guinea, Senegal, France, 2003 and 2009).

46. Manthia Diawara, "Oral Literature and African Film: Narratology in *Wend Kuuni*," in *Questions of Third Cinema*, ed. Jim Pines and Paul Willemen (London: British Films Institute, 1989), 206.

47. *Ibid.*

48. bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 9.

49. Anjali Prabhu, *Contemporary Cinema of Africa and the Diaspora* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 4.

50. *Ibid.*, 5.

51. We recognize Kwame Nkrumah Avenue in Ougadougou. Could it be read as a symbol of revolution, or is it alerting viewers to the risk of power's deviation?

52. Moussa Diagana and Dani Kouyaté, "Sia, le rêve du python: l'adaptation littéraire au cinéma Moussa Diagana et Dani Kouyaté," collected by Olivier Barlet, <http://www.africultures.com/php/?nav=article&no=2775>.

53. In *Sia*, this is after the prologue, with the opening voice-over, showing a night scene of the council of ministers.

54. *Creation in Exile*, 38' 21"– 38' 40".

55. My interview, Savona, 2010.

56. Diagana and Kouyaté, "Sia, le rêve du python."

Part Two

Forgotten Diasporas

Lusophone and Indian Diasporas

Mami Wata, Migrations, and Miscegenation

Transculturalism in José Eduardo Agualusa,
Mia Couto, and Germano Almeida

Niyi Afolabi

The defining legacy of colonialism in the Lusophone world lies in the enduring relics of cultural miscegenation. While each nation responds differently to this intercultural exchange, some writers deploy the transcultural phenomenon to question and embrace cultural contacts and the aftermath. This holds especially true for the subjects who remain marginalized and oppressed by the realities of the unfulfilled promises that constitute the logic (or lack thereof) of that cultural contact. This chapter selects three texts by “representative” writers from Angola, Mozambique, and Cape Verde as case studies of transculturalism within the postcolonial condition in the Lusophone world.

My understanding of *transculturalism* stems from José Martí, who defines the term as “the very complex transmutations of culture that can be phased in acculturation, deculturation, and neoculturation. In other words, transculturation highlights the creation of a new cultural phenomenon.”¹ By analyzing José Agualusa’s *Nação Crioula* (Creole nation), Mia Couto’s *O Outro Pé da Sereia* (The other foot of the mermaid), and Germano Almeida’s *O Testamento do Senhor Napumoceno* (The last will of Napumoceno), I problematize the racial inequalities and power relations within those supposedly empowering “neutral spaces” while highlighting the sexual oppression, physical violence, and persistent silencing camouflaged under fashionable terms such as *modernity*, *multicultural identity*, and *cosmopolitanism*. While the transcultural “migration of the subject” will vary from one narrative space/text to the other, the essence of

shifting identities and negotiation of power relations and equality will remain an inextricable constant.

Lusophone African literature of the new millennium is faced with a constant series of transitions from the memory of, and struggles for, independence, the equally devastating civil wars and the efforts at reconstruction, reconciliation, and integration into the global cultural patterns without losing its own identity. Mia Couto, a renowned Mozambican writer who won the 2014 Neustadt Prize, offers some pertinent thoughts in his volume of critical opinions, *Pensativities*, in which he postulates about the Mozambican as a “cultural frontiersman” who must refrain from looking externally for someone to blame for (and solutions to) internal problems. The Mozambican—and, by extension, the African—is a “multicultural” being who must celebrate other cultures that have intersected their culture for no nation can boast to be culturally pure. He advances the argument that the African writer is a “traveler between identities, a smuggler of souls.”² He further argues that “race-mixture” (*mestiçagem*) need not be limited to the biological but can be seen as a metaphor for cultural crossroads. Couto finally proposes a vision devoid of *-isms* that can serve as a point of departure for rethinking issues of identity that pervade most of the works coming out of Lusophone Africa in recent years: “Confronted with our most deeply felt vulnerabilities, we must create a new vision. . . . We cannot beg the world for another image. . . . The only solution is to continue the long, hard journey towards conquering a place of which we and our nation are worthy. And that place can only be the product of our creation.”³ It is along the lines of the problematization of identities that I find such terms pertinent: *Mami Wata*,⁴ *migrations*,⁵ *miscegenation*,⁶ and *transculturalism*.⁷

These concepts attribute a sense of constant motion, shifts, transformation, hybridization, and fluidity to identities that do not imply any particular loss of identity, but an enrichment of identities despite the struggle with elusive authenticity. By appropriating the iconicity of *Mami Wata*, an African mermaid representative of all other water spirits in the coastal areas of Africa as well as the African diaspora, I concur with Henry Drewal’s description of the mermaid: “At once beautiful, protective, seductive, and potentially deadly, the water spirit *Mami Wata* (Mother Water) is celebrated throughout much of Africa and the African Atlantic worlds.”⁸ This inherent ability to crisscross oceans and continents while retaining its basic characteristics exemplifies Fernando Ortiz’s transculturation, which implies conflictual tensions played out and resolved in the cultural contact zone where different cultures meet, clash, and resolve their conflicts through adaptations and mutual influences.⁹ In the specific case of the Lusophone African world, the miscegenated world created by the contact between Portugal and the rest of the Portuguese-speaking world is marred by colonial violence and oppression that should not be overlooked when trying to understand transcultural identities. The triangular relations implicit in the three texts chosen for analysis, even in their varying thematic concerns, recognize the dominant posture of Portugal in relation to the three nations from where these texts emerge, namely Angola, Mozambique, and

Cape Verde. The themes of adventure and misadventure, of history and identity, of lost love and recuperation of lineage as depicted in Agualusa's *Nação Crioula*, Couto's *O Outro Pé da Sereia*, and Almeida's *O Testamento do Senhor Napumoceno* offer a unique window into the shifting dynamics of identity in the process of cultural migrations.

The treatment of the sea in Lusophone literatures dates back to Luis de Camões's 1524 epic, *Os Lusíadas* (The Lusiads), Fernando Pessoa's 1934 poem "Mar Português" (Portuguese sea), and Jorge Amado's 1969 *Mar Morto* (The sea of death). When it comes to Lusophone African literatures, much of the poetic production about the sea comes from Cape Verdean literature given its insularity and emigration to Europe and the Americas due to drought. While Camões and Pessoa evoke the greatness of Portugal, Cape Verdean poets address issues of struggle between humans and the environment as the inhabitants cope with the flagellation of nature through drought and torrential rains. The three writers engaged in this chapter—namely Agualusa, Couto, and Almeida—are postmodern and transnational in the conceptual sense that David Brookshaw qualifies as the "undermining of realism"¹⁰ and "re-establishment of the division between history and fiction, reality and art, while at the same time questioning the validity of history as a fixed objective truth."¹¹ Even when the writers differ in their treatment of the sea or their narrative construction using a journey motif across the Atlantic, their commonality resides in the problematization of location and culture. It is along the same lines that Phillip Rothwell characterizes Couto's overarching invocation of the sea (or water) in his works as "the forum of plexiform history and emblem of the unconscious, the ability to undermine the binary certainties that underscore European tradition . . . favoring ambiguity over definiteness, and liquidity over rigidity."¹² The texts under analysis coalesce in their subscription to transculturality while embracing the significance of migration and miscegenation facilitated by the fluidity of the sea.

Agualusa's *Nação Crioula*

José Eduardo Agualusa is an innovative Angolan writer who revisits the historical tragedies of colonialism and critiques them through dry humor. Targeted in this critique are the collaborators such as the Portuguese, Angolan elites, and Brazilian merchants—all of whom participated in the triangular Atlantic slave trade. As a curious Portuguese adventurer and explorer, Fradique is in the company of Ana Olímpia, a miscegenated African goddess who was a former slave and daughter of a Congolese prince. They both find themselves on a ship named *Creole Nation* from which the novel derives its title. Other slaves, slave traders, and abolitionists also populate the ship as if the novel becomes a metaphoric journey for the middle passage and slave trade. Through the prism of the omniscient narrator, the author retells the story by recharting the course of history while questioning the inequalities and economic benefits at the root

of the slave trade. It is thus unquestionable that Agualusa's *Nação Crioula* (Creole nation) sets out to expose the contradictions of slavery, cultural exchanges, and consequent miscegenation in a rather humorous yet indicting manner. Its subtitle, "The Secret Correspondence of Fradique Mendes," unveils the epistolary structure of twenty-five letters he sent to Madame Jouarre, his godmother, his beloved wife, Ana Olímpia, and his great friend, Eça de Queirós, a nineteenth-century Portuguese author who is fictionalized in this surrealist epic that critiques slavery as the protagonist (Fradique Mendes) journeys through Luanda, Lisbon, Paris, and Brazil. Interestingly, Eça de Queirós collected the letters and published them following the death of Fradique Mendes.

Structurally circular in terms of displacements within the text itself and equally fragmented across three continents (Angola-Europe-Angola-Brazil-Europe-Brazil-Europe-Angola), the journeys and letters of the Portuguese adventurer, Fradique, serve as a form of therapy from nostalgia as well as fulfilling curiosities about the world outside Europe. His encounters with other cultures, participation in parties, escapades, and courageous struggles against close deadly calls, form a dialogic discourse through which we gain insights about his worldview and philosophy. In Fradique's August 1872 letter from Luanda to his godmother in Lisbon, Madame de Jouarre, he recounts his wonderment as to why slaves were not set free; for in doing so, they could be more productive and produce ten times more harvest than when they were slaves: "So why didn't she free her household slaves? 'Because' she said to me 'it would be like letting my own family go.' . . . 'We have responsibilities to them.' . . . 'We can't set them free, as the wretches wouldn't know what to do with their freedom.'"¹³ This opportune dialogue is a commentary on the fallacious justification for continued slavery and why abolition was resisted. It is not true that slaves would not know what to do with their freedom; it is equally not true that slaves were "members" of the slave owner's family. Rather, the free labor provided by slaves was the central issue these claims obfuscate. It is an economic issue, not a humanistic one. Agualusa's ability to craft such contradictory moments allow for a nuanced reading by any perceptive reader.

Whether it is about the romance between Fradique and Ana Olímpia or the many references to historical figures and writers such as Eça de Queirós, José do Patrocínio, Castro Alves, and Gonçalves Dias, Agualusa anchors his narrative on a plantation setting and efforts at abolition through the critical dialogic engagement with the absurdities of slavery. Fradique Mendes, a Portuguese adventurer, could not possibly be the ideal abolitionist, but through his sense of humor and depiction of the ironies of enslavement itself, the abolitionist movement is given a central emphasis, while providing comic relief to the reader all at the same time. One such ironic moment is the last letter of the novel, written by Ana Olímpia to Eça de Queirós after the illness and death of Fradique, and thus the end of his journey. Simultaneously celebrating the fact that Eça de Queirós suggested collecting these correspondences as a "*kind tribute to the most interesting Portuguese man of the nineteenth century*,"¹⁴ and as a reflection on her own life, Ana Olímpia provides a religious explanation for

her inability to let go of her own slaves, given that she had once been a slave herself: "Once Fradique asked me why I didn't free my slaves. I explained to him that they had been brought up with me, under my roof, that I felt attached to them as though they were my own family. . . . And I quoted the Bible: 'It may be that thy bondman will say unto thee 'I will not go away from thee' . . . and he shall be thy servant forever.'"¹⁵ Ana Olímpia's attitude toward the abolition of slavery is nothing short of a contradiction. She has no convincing explanation for keeping slaves other than the fact that the slaves were "content" (given their hope for religious salvation and the gain of the celestial kingdom in the afterlife) in their condition and could not see things otherwise. This final correspondence, mixed with ambivalent joy and melancholy, translates the narrative pretext and the justification for the publication of the letters as sent to Eça de Queirós.

The question remains: can the reader see anything abolitionist in Fradique Mendes or Ana Olímpia? Both are implicated in the drama of slavery even when Fradique's empathy may well be attributable to the Lusotropicalist idea of "race-mixture" through which he can symbolically explain his sexual and romantic relations with Ana Olímpia. Olímpia, on the other hand, balances her suffering as a slave under the ugly Gabriela Santamarinha with the power she later acquired as a slave owner after the demise of her former master and husband, Vitorino. As she reflects at the end of the narrative, Ana Olímpia continues her quest for understanding slavery, yet her metaphysical explanation is far from being that of an abolitionist:

Many people are unable to understand why most slaves accept their lot once they have arrived in America or Brazil. At the time I didn't understand it either. Now I do. On board the ship on which we fled Angola, the *Nação Crioula*, I met an old man who claimed to have been a friend of my father. He reminded me that in our language (as in almost all West African languages) the same word is used for 'the sea' and 'death': *Calunga*. So for most slaves that journey was a passage across death. The life they had left behind in Africa was Life; the one they found in America or Brazil, a Rebirth.¹⁶

This ritualistic understanding (as regeneration) of the slave's journey from Africa to the Americas is problematic and escapist. If the Atlantic journey is a mix of life and death, the violence in the course of that same journey, which for some led to death through violence or death by suicide, cannot be said to be a positive transformation. In the context of *Mami Wata*, the sea as the abode of this female deity embodies both destructive and protective forces. Yet, for the millions who did not make it to the other side of the Atlantic alive, and for the millions who succumbed to the hardships of enslavement, the forced migration of Africans for the purpose of enslavement can only be seen as a death sentence with limited regenerative possibilities whether en route or at their destination. In the broader lusotropicalist sense, the only "regeneration"

possible is limited to the miscegenation theory principle, which is equally problematic since the implicit sexual violence indicates that the dominated slave woman is not a willing participant in that artificial genetic engineering.

Couto's *O Outro Pé da Sereia*

If Agualusa inscribes humorous pleasure by questioning slavery and the participants in the human atrocity, in *Nação Crioula* Mia Couto adopts the narrative-within-a-narrative approach to dislocate Western cultural hegemony, while suggesting that Africa symbolically remains the “other foot of the mermaid” as the inseparable Siamese twin of Portugal. This penchant for a lusotropicalist vision is not a complacent one; it is an attempt to bridge continents, historical periods, value systems, mythologies, belief systems, and cultural crucibles, which are all interfaced with a migrational narrative construction whose knot can be untied only by the singular mysteries of the sea, which are embedded in the figure of the *Kianda* (mermaid). The reader gets the sense that Couto problematizes Portuguese hegemony by offering the counter discourse that post-colonial African countries are rewriting their own histories from the viewpoint of the decolonized even when contradicted by their embrace of cultural miscegenation. In the sixteenth century, the character of the Portuguese Jesuit Dom Gonçalo da Silveira leaves Goa in India on an adventurous quest for the mythical Monomotapa kingdom in Africa in order to convert its emperor to Christianity. In a historical leap from the colonial past to the postindependence present, Couto deploys a pretext of the one-legged statue of the Virgin Mary, which the colonial missionary had inadvertently left in his ship, as a puzzle that must be unraveled in contemporary Mozambique. Thus, five hundred years after that colonial adventure, a naive couple, Zero Madzero and Mwadia Malunga, stumble upon this statue floating in the Mussenguezi River, but are quickly warned by the diviner Lázaro Vivo that failure to create an abode for the statue would amount to unimaginable consequences for they are disrupting its peace.

Drawing a parallel with the attributes of *Mami Wata*, Couto's metaphoric mermaid in *O Outro Pé da Sereia* echoes Drewal's postulation of the boundless possibilities of this complex agency:

It is her hybridity, her trans-ness, that helps to explain her power and presence. She is compelling because she transgresses boundaries; she embodies the qualities of “mixed origins.” In her manifestation as mermaid, Mami Wata is at once human and fish, air-breathing and water-dwelling: she is fish, yet not fish; human, yet not human. Often shown handling snakes, she bridges cultural and natural realms. She may be female or male. She lives on the hyphen of existence. She is a complex multivocal, multifocal symbol with so many resonances that she feeds the imagination, generating, rather than limiting, meaning and significances.¹⁷

This expansive characterization confirms the real and figurative transnational journey that the Coutoesque mermaid has made in the process of becoming not just a symbol inadvertently left on the colonial-missionary ship, but one that manages to ease back into the sea to continue its mission of protecting its devotees that are both under the sea (such as the spirits of the dead) as well as those who are living above the sea (on earth, the living), those who are indeed struggling against the vicissitudes of colonialism and enslavement of the children of *Mami Wata*. It is instructive that while Couto deploys a mermaid as an allegory of transnationalism, religiosity, and transculturalism, he is also conscientious of creating unusual characters, such as the African American Benjamin Southman, who sets out to discover his roots in a Lusophone African setting of Mozambique. Benjamin's affiliation with a nongovernmental organization—usually an entity set up locally but benefiting from external funding—suggests that Couto is at once critiquing the ambivalence of such development projects and at the same time celebrating the African American search for identity in Africa.

At issue in *O Outro Pé da Sereia* is the broader question concerning the West's perception of Africa over the course of history. The stereotypes about Africa being a barbaric "dark continent," an exotic location to observe subservient species, and the deluding convictions that Africans are less than human or at least "inferior" to Caucasians often distort the reality of Africa's complex cultures and identity. Couto's juxtaposition of two periods, the colonial and postindependence, complicates this image of Africa. The conclusion may well be that five hundred years after slavery and colonialism, the representation of Africa has yet to change. The result is a haunting quagmire, which Couto highlights and contests. It is common for the West to see Africa as superstitious and backward, just because these adventurous "strangers" in Africa did not take the time to study, respect, and appreciate African cultures in their totality and complexity.

Dominant discourses distort the image of Africa in the same way they distorted the reality of slavery. In Brazil, for example, it used to be acceptable for African descendants to be portrayed as "happy slaves" in *novelas* (soap operas) as a necessary strategy to maintain the system of slavery. The era of slavery and its attendant powerlessness and dispossession of African descendants make Europeans more in control of their own destinies as explorers and conquerors than as oppressive exploiters. The invocation of Benjamin Southman as the new African American seeking the truth about his past evokes another instance of the simplification of Africa. The female diviner of Vila Longe helps him connect with his past plays into the deceptive stereotypes about Africa instead of immersing the African American into the complex realities of African culture. On the one hand, Benjamin Southman goes to Africa to discover his roots but with some a priori notions of Africa as a backward and primitive place. On the other hand, the diviner, Benjamin's closest intermediary, invents an incredible story to appeal to the yearnings of the American instead of telling him that she knows about his past. Couto criticizes such a romantic view of Africa and

proposes a rethinking of such a dependent form of living in relation to the European colonizer: “A Europa continua a visitar África como quem vai em peregrinação—para encontrar o que ela acredita ali ter deixado. África ainda olha a Europa com algum oportunismo desresponsabilizante—ficámos independentes mas não nos emancipámos.”¹⁸ [Europe continues to visit Africa like someone on a pilgrimage—in order to find what it believes it left there. Africa still looks up to Europe with an air of irresponsible opportunism; we are independent but we have yet to liberate ourselves.]

Historical memory is never easy to confront, especially when such memories are traumatic and reminiscent of moments of ethnic conflicts and brutalization of identities. Similar to the overlapping narrative structure that brought Couto to the limelight in *Terra Sonâmbula* (Sleepwalking land), *O Outro Pé da Sereia* unveils important historical events that are prone to erasure and forgetting since those who were victimized in such contexts would rather not remember, yet *O Outro Pé da Sereia* forces the reader to confront these stories that form part of a collective postcolonial memory. In its transcultural pretext, the narrative emerges as two alternating histories, one operating in the present and the other functioning as the past, which is being reflected upon in the present. The reader perceives a deliberate transcultural portrayal of the postcolonial characters who must confront the impacts of indigenous and external influences on their identity. In essence Mozambican colonial history confronts simultaneously Mozambican contemporary history. The result of such tension is the reality that Mozambique is permanently stuck in its search for national identity. Couto suggests, for example, that Mozambique has yet to confront its own guilt in the transatlantic slave trade. Instead, the dwellers of Vila Longe adopt magical realism as a way to erase memories of guilt by planting a tree that is supposed to immunize them from any complicity and guilt:

Não havia em toda a redondeza um exemplar maior de mulambe. A árvore era conhecida, desde há séculos, como “a árvore das voltas”: quem rodasse três vezes em seu redor perdia a memória. Deixaria de saber de onde veio, quem eram os seus antepassados. Tudo para ele se tornaria recente, sem raiz, sem amarras. Quem não tem passado não pode ser responsabilizado. O que se perde em amnésia, ganha-se em amnistia.¹⁹

[No greater exemplary *mulambe* tree existed in the entire surrounding. The tree has been known for centuries as “the tree of returns”: whoever circles round it three times would lose his memory. He would forget where he came from or who his ancestors were. Everything for this person would become recent, without roots, without memories. Whoever is deprived of a past cannot be held responsible. What is lost in amnesia is gained in amnesty.]

The illusion of masking one’s memory under the mythological potential of traditional belief systems is more ridiculous than facing a painful past and

deploying coping strategies to deal with such absurd memories. In other words, the wishful delusion to escape the reality of one's fragmented identity by fantasizing about a ritual of circling the sacred "tree of returns" only serves as a provisional escape from reality. The reality for most traumatized individuals is shame in the face of their true new identity, which is constituted by alienation.

In linking the past with the present, Couto craftily subjects the colonial adventure to scrutiny, subverting its pretensions and hypocrisies, while at the same time showing the humanity of the enslaved and the potential redemption of the enslaver. The statue of the Holy Mother, which at some point fuses with that of the Kianda (mermaid) serves as a point of religious syncretism even as the colonial missionary and the contemporary traditional healer (*curandeiro*) appear to be engaged in a series of deceptions and abuses. What is clear is that Couto sets out to question in a subtle rather than radical manner the stereotypes about Africa on both sides of the Atlantic. Conversion missions and the transatlantic voyages have a common journey motif: the Atlantic Ocean and the implicit significance of water in African mythology. The many instances of culture shock between African belief systems and the Christian faith seem deliberate in order to educate both cultures on the contradictions inherent in their religious faiths. It is also curious that the ship on its way from Goa to Monomotapa was not only carrying missionaries but also African slaves. One such African slave, named Nimi Nsundi, feels a special bond with the statue of the Holy Mother whom he quickly associated with the *Mami Wata* or Kianda in Kimbundu.

While the African slave could easily relate the image of the Holy Mother with that of the Kianda, Padre Antunes, a priest on board the same *Our Lady of Ajuda* ship, comes to terms with his own carnality through a dream in which he had carnal knowledge of an Indian woman, Dia. In the dream, the woman bids him farewell at the bay of the Mandovi River. Before the farewell, she removes his clothes and hers—reassuring him that that would be the only way he will remember her. Encouraging him to touch her as a magical form of rebirth, he suddenly wakes up in a panic attack. He goes back to sleep only to return to the dream in which he drowns and comes face to face with the same Indian woman (under water), who introduces herself as Kianda. This dream provoked a religious and identity crisis for the priest. The narrative is full of many instances of his shifting transformation from a devoted Christian to a questioning priest—not only about his faith but also about the oppressive treatment of African slaves, which goes against Christian doctrine. On one occasion, Padre Antunes questions the afflictions of the slaves and becomes conflicted about his own Christian faith:

A mais cruel das memórias de Manuel Antunes era de um escravo, que, desesperado de fome, cortou a língua e a comeu. Mais do que uma recordação era um símbolo da condição da gente negra: exilada do passado, impedida de falar senão na língua dos outros, obrigada a escolher entre a sobrevivência imediata e a morte anunciada.²⁰

[The most cruel of the memories of Manuel Antunes was that of a slave, who, desperately famished, cut his own tongue and ate it. More than a simple remembrance, it was a symbol of the conditions of blacks: exiles of their past, prohibited to speak any language other than that of the Other, obliged to choose between immediate survival and imminent death.]

A perceptive reader begins to put the loose ends together: Couto is narrating not just how the Kianda, as the magical realist agent of the Atlantic Ocean, controls the lives of the missionaries, the enslaver, and the slaves, who, ironically, are stockpiled under the most inhumane conditions in the hold of the supposed missionary ship. For how else can one explain the suicide of Nsundi, the African slave who ultimately committed suicide for believing that Kianda is “trapped” in the statue of the Holy Mother and chose to break off one of its legs to release the Kianda. As punishment, he was locked up in the hold of the ship and threatened with a possible death sentence. When he had the opportunity, he jumped into the ocean as if to metaphorically return to Kianda. Dia, the Indian woman, found a letter he left for her, which reads: “A verdadeira viagem é a que fazemos dentro de nós”²¹ [the real journey is that which we take within ourselves]. Couto is appropriately evoking here an abstract, even psychological journey, that only the individual could embark upon in order to come to terms with reality and process the therapeutic escape on one’s own terms. No one could have processed or prevented Nsundi’s suicide. In this metaphysical sense, death becomes an escape, a perpetual movement in the elusive search for life whether it is in the present or in the afterlife.

Couto’s work oscillates between two historical moments that often call into question the fluid passage between reality and the imaginary while mediating how the reader perceives and interprets events. Magical realism pervades the corpus of Couto’s writing. In this narrative of multiple migrations and transformations, magical realism provides an opportunity to use memory to reconstruct reality, create new identities, and subject past assumptions to ridicule and scrutiny. In the final analysis, the metaphors of the mermaid, the tree of forgetfulness, and interlocking journeys of discovery demonstrate that Mozambican identity, miscegenated or not, continues to be a fluid process of the imagination.

Almeida’s O Testamento do Sr. Napumoceno

While the transculturality of Mia Couto is invested in a journey motif through a revisitation of “histories”—colonial, individual, and collective—Germano Almeida’s transculturalism is achieved through a memorialist construction that is revealed to the characters only posthumously. The will left by Napumoceno must be understood as a pretext to actually share his autobiography with those close to him, including secrets of his past life that are not revealed while he

was alive. Deploying a multivocal approach through which the entire life of Napumoceno is reconstructed, Almeida mixes satire, humor, and sarcasm to render a social critique of Cape Verdean life during the early era of independence. The will serves as a migrational instrument to move from the present to the past, and in the process highlights a new genre in Cape Verdean literature beyond insularity, drought, and emigration. Unlike the emigration phase of Cape Verdean literature when drought and torrential rains served as the impetus for emigration, the “migration of the subject” is actually taking place within Cape Verde, hence a creative intramigration of sorts. The reader is craftily led on a long journey through different moments and spaces of Cape Verde, but the focus is on a number of critical characters such as Adélia, Napumoceno, Maria da Graça, and Carlos.

In merging three narrative times into one, Almeida creatively allows the reader to participate in the critical events that make up the life of the novel: (1) the more visible life of the protagonist, Napumoceno, whose business acumen, despite his shrewd devices, is lived before us through the omniscient narrator; (2) the “other” life of Napumoceno, which is steeped in mysteries and secrets—some of which are unorthodox, often entertaining, comical, yet important since they ultimately shape how the precise, methodic, and satiric Napumoceno will be remembered posthumously; (3) the third narrative time, which is lived in the present, deals with the “long reading” of the will by Napumoceno’s attorney, who inadvertently becomes another narrator, even as family members and friends participate in the unveiling of Napumoceno’s secret lives. That the reader is only getting the full picture of the life of Napumoceno echoes a similar narrative technique in Machado de Assis’s *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas*, though instead of dealing with Machado’s dog to which the protagonist wills his entire fortune, we are dealing with a loyal cousin, Carlos, hopeful for a share of Napumoceno’s inheritance; Maria da Graça, his daughter; and the mysterious mother, Adélia, whom we find out much about and whom Maria sets out to find.²² The notebooks found by Maria when she discovers the love affair of her father and Adélia set in motion another journey of discovery about the identity of her father and mother. The novel in this sense appears fragmented and the various parts are ultimately given cohesion as the emotional side of her father’s personality and the identity of her mother are revealed in order to render a complete narrative of her family as well as bring about closure for a daughter who is inheriting the fortune of a father she did not know so well.

Brookshaw’s suggestion that the search for Adélia is futile for the narrative has the potential to play “with our doubts through a game of duplicity and self-undermining”²³ is worth exploring and questioning. These doubts may refer to the fact that Adélia herself was not monogamous and was in love with a seaman, whose return to Adélia forced Napumoceno to return to Mindelo to organize his life and business. What if Adélia is not really Maria’s mother? Some of Napumoceno’s reflections are all about Adélia’s innocence and beauty, his shyness in revealing what he thinks about her, and his request for

a photograph so he could simply remember her and say what he did not have the courage to say directly. According to the notebooks Maria found, “at first Sr. Napumoceno didn’t treat her like a woman . . . it never occurred to him to kiss her less to take her to bed . . . it was a love that he knew was not innocent and that at the same time had nothing carnal in it.”²⁴ Ambiguity is the best way to explicate the relationship between Napumoceno and Adélia, for there were moments in the novel when Napumoceno felt passionate and nostalgic about Adélia despite the triangle created with the existence of another man for whom Adélia clearly declares her love:

For nearly 18 months Sr. Napumoceno allowed himself to be slowly consumed by a demented passion that ended up poisoning his existence, because, when he finally acknowledged it was over, he continued to live with the dream of Adélia, since she had confessed to him that she felt very close to a man whose eyes smiled when he saw her and who treated her like an expensive doll and was sweet and good to her.²⁵

The reader is puzzled by the true identities of Maria and her mother: Adélia or possibly Dona Chica, whom Napumoceno raped several times in his office. Given Dona Chica’s low-class status, it may well be that Napumoceno was ashamed of identifying a maid or a messenger as the mother of his child. Almeida may have deliberately left the identity of Maria as a puzzle. The reader knows Napumoceno is white, Adélia is biracial, while Dona Chica is black. The distancing from one and approximation with the other evokes the challenges of Lusotropicalism and the attendant preference for the *mestizo* ideal. While Almeida’s proposal for miscegenation is subtle, the miscegenated identity of Maria da Graça suggests that she is a product of at least two races.²⁶ Even if Adélia’s existence is a figment of Napumoceno’s imagination, Dona Chica’s existence is unquestionable. Napumoceno never bothered to find out if Dona Chica became pregnant as the relationship was simply sexual and not conjugal as was his relationship with the mysterious Adélia. In sum, the existence of Maria da Graça, to whom Napumoceno leaves most of his fortune, confirms his transculturality as well as the lusotropicalist legacy he bequeaths to Maria.

The unresolved search for the significant Other in all three texts analyzed, whether through real migration across continents or through symbolisms of journeying through the lives of the protagonists that reveals bits and pieces of a fragmented identity, vividly demonstrates the persistent desire for the colonial Other through the trope of the sea that *Mami Wata* embodies. In this chapter, identity is only minimally confronted in the burden of race that confronts the biracial subject in its liminal existence. Fradique Mendes, a Portuguese adventurer in Agualusa’s *Nação Crioula*, defends slavery and fails at his abolitionist pretense. While the Kianda (mermaid) serves as the unifying force of protection among the dualities of colonizer-colonized, enslaver-enslaved, missionary-pagan, she equally fails to protect Nsundi from committing suicide

in *O Outro Pé da Sereia*. Maria da Graça, despite the fortune she inherits from Sr. Nepumoceno, is faced with the dilemma of her own crisis of identity: If her mother is Adélia, why did her father keep that knowledge from her? And if she is not, who is her legitimate mother? The three writers seem to coalesce in the quests for resolution of the crisis of identity and the imperative of freedom that miscegenation has not resolved. The *Mami Wata* trope makes a case for multiplicity of identities to the extent that most of her victims or devotees always venerate water and the sea. A postcolonial reading of these texts deconstructs binary constructions while proposing a multiplicity of identities as a potential resolution of transcultural ambivalence.

Notes

1. Markus Heide and José Markus, "José Martí, Cuban Cultural Theory, and Inter-American Studies," in *Transmediality and Transculturality*, ed. Nadia Gernalzick et al. (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 2013), 141–57.

2. Mia Couto, *Pensativities: Essays and Provocations*, trans. David Brookshaw (Windsor, ON: Biblioasis, 2015), 23.

3. *Ibid.*, 13.

4. *Mami Wata* is a river goddess who is prominently worshipped in various parts of Africa and the Americas.

5. Migrations are the flows of people, ideas, and goods as the world becomes more and more globalized. Yet there is also internal migration that compels people to move. I deploy *migration* in the very general sense that can mean physical, metaphorical, and psychological displacement. In the more generalized movement of people from one place to another, one can conjecture the forcible type (slavery) and the voluntary (economically, politically, and socially motivated) that is geared toward the search for a better life.

6. *Miscegenation* refers to mixture between two or more races. It is a problematic term for it means something different for different scholars. There are those who see it as creating a cosmic race while others highlight the contradictions the miscegenated person experiences when he or she is not accepted by either race but is seen more as a false identity. Regardless of the position taken by scholars, the realities remain that a miscegenated subject is at the mercy of acceptance by society as either "superior" to blacks, while not quite as equal to whites. It is a problematic in-between condition.

7. *Transculturation* is credited to Fernando Ortiz, the twentieth-century Cuban sociologist, who invented the term as a contrast to *acculturation*, which he finds one-dimensional as the individual or group consciously moves from one culture to another while basically repressing their original cultural identity. For Ortiz, transculturation allows for the encounter of cultures where each one adapts to the other without any sense of imposition. See Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, trans. Harriet de Ornis (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 98.

8. Henry John Drewal, "Mami Wata: Arts for Water Spirits in Africa and Its Diasporas," *African Arts* (Summer 2008): 60.

9. See Ortiz, *Tobacco and Sugar*, and Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).

10. David Brookshaw, "Cape Verde," in *The Postcolonial Literature of Lusophone Africa*, ed. Chabal et al. (London: Hurst, 1996), 190.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Phillip Rothwell, *A Postmodern Nationalist* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2004), 100.

13. José Eduardo Agualusa, *Creole*, trans. Daniel Hahn, (London: Arcadia, 2002), 41.

14. *Ibid.*, 129; italics original.

15. *Ibid.*, 145.

16. *Ibid.*, 151–52.

17. Henry John Drewal, ed., *Sacred Waters: Arts for Mami Wata and Other Divinities in Africa and the Diaspora* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 2. See also Henry John Drewal, *Mami Wata: Arts for Water Spirits in Africa and Its Diasporas* (Los Angeles: Fowler Museum at UCLA, 2008), 5.

18. Mia Couto, "A Guerra é uma cobra que usa os nossos dentes para nos morder," in *The Paths of Multiculturalism: Travel Writings and Postcolonialism*, ed. Maria-Alzira Seixo et al. (Lisbon: Cosmos, 2000), 491.

19. *Ibid.*, 320–21.

20. *Ibid.*, 260.

21. Mia Couto, *O Outro Pé da Sereia*. (Lisboa: Caminho, 2006), 207.

22. For an in-depth analysis of this maternal search, see Robert H. Moser, "A Busca de Adélia: Narrativa Póstuma em 'Testamento do Senhor Napumoceno da Silva Araújo' de Germano Almeida," special issue, *Portuguese Literary and Cultural Studies* 8 (2003): 327–33. See also Brookshaw, "Cape Verde," 189–93.

23. Brookshaw, "Cape Verde," 191.

24. Germano Almeida, *The Last Will and Testament of Senhor da Silva Araújo*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (New York: New Directions, 2004), 87.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Lusotropicalism is the proposal of Gilberto Freyre, especially known for *Casa Grande e Senzala* (1933). He believes that the relationship between the masters and the slaves during slavery was harmonious. This idea has been used to justify Portuguese colonialism across the Lusophone world.

Poor Migrant

Poverty and Striving in Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* and *The Pickup*

S. Shankar

African migration is putatively the subject of the hypnotic track “Boat Journey” by Tony Allen, Fela Kuti’s celebrated drummer and collaborator in the creation of Afrobeat. Since the 1960s, Afrobeat has been one of the primary expressive modes through which Africa’s realities have been urgently imagined and interpreted. In “Boat Journey,” Allen continues this tradition of social commentary with migration as its subject matter. “Boat Journey” appears on Allen’s 2014 album *Film of Life*.¹ Its lyrics depict African migrants traveling desperately, if fruitlessly, in search of a better future: “Now you jump into the boat / To cruise the ocean with all your family / Lookin lookin’ for better situation across the ocean / But you never arrive / Don’t take the boat journey, my brothers! / Don’t take the boat journey, my sisters!” The lyrics, presented in Allen’s voice and anchored by his famed drumming, exhort the migrants against a fraught journey that begins in “running away from misery” but ends tragically in “never arriv[ing].” These lyrics of dreadful migrant fates foretold acquires fresh piquancy when we remind ourselves that Allen was born in Lagos, Nigeria, but now lives in Paris, France—surely, migration is experienced differently depending on who is migrating and for what purpose.²

The urgency of this theme of migration is also signaled by *Borders*, the 2015 music video by artistic provocateur MIA. Performed and directed by MIA, this remarkable video echoes Allen in multiple ways. It presents humanity on the move—on boats across the ocean, in long files across a barren landscape, clambering over fences. MIA’s own background includes arriving in Britain as a Tamil refugee to escape the political violence in Sri Lanka. Given that the video was released a few months after the summer of 2015, it would make sense for

us to interpret it as a comment on the flood of migrants flowing across the Mediterranean during that summer from Africa, Syria, and farther afield.

However, MIA's video does not specify a reason why the racially ambiguous migrants featured in the video are on the move. Indeed, I would argue that the power of the video lies precisely in *not* focusing on a *single* cause. Are the migrants fleeing war? political repression? poverty? The video does not specify. Instead, in its refrain it suggests multiple reasons that include but also go beyond political conflict—"Borders (What's up with that?) / Broke people (What's up with that?) / Boat people (What's up with that?)." The refrain opts for questions over conclusions. Might the unnatural political borders left behind by colonial history be at the root of the violence setting humanity on the move? Certainly. And should we understand "Broke People" to mean both people who are broken mentally, physically, spiritually as well as people without money, people fleeing for economic reasons? Surely. Open-ended in its series of references, *Borders* includes these possibilities and more.

In this chapter, my particular subjects are poor migrants. I take Tony Allen and MIA as signaling a broader context for my particular theme—the theme of migrants as *broke people*, that is, of migrants forced into displacement by the ravages of poverty. Both Allen and MIA offer illuminating musical explorations of the connections between poverty and migration in the contemporary global context—the former's exhortations as well as the latter's questions invoke the myriad complex, contradictory, and confusing entanglements of a global situation of wealth and deprivation. Where MIA asks, "Broke people (What's up with that?)," Tony Allen exhorts his brothers and sisters not to "jump into the boat" despite the misery they want to escape because they will not arrive to safety on the other side. It is not necessary to test the truth of Allen's claim to appreciate the import of his exhortation. No doubt the vast majority of "boat people" do cross safely. But does that justify the "boat journey"? In another cryptic line, Allen suggests only more misery awaits the migrants on their arrival.

It is into this vast terrain opened up by Allen and MIA that I make a brief foray with my argument about migration and poverty. The context is South Africa, my material two novels by Nadine Gordimer—*July's People* and *The Pickup*—that, twenty years apart, offer illuminating explorations of my theme. Poverty is certainly a necessary, if difficult, subject with regard to migration. According to the World Bank, in 1990, 35 percent of the world's population lived in extreme poverty, and 10.7 percent do still.³ With regard to South Africa more particularly, Grace Davie noted in 2015 in her book *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa*,

Twenty years after apartheid, poverty remains a huge problem. In contrast to those who want the state to focus on growth, other experts point to the need for even more aggressive interventions in the economy. One surveyor recently concluded that overall levels of destitution are the same as they were when the African National Congress (ANC) took power in

South Africa. Young people feel totally excluded from the economy. And South Africa is now undisputedly the most unequal nation in the world, with the bulk of the nation's wealth remaining in the hands of the white minority and a new black business elite.⁴

Taken together, Gordimer's two novels straddle these social scientific statistics of global and South African poverty. I cite these figures to suggest telegraphically the historical terrain that is the subject of Gordimer's imaginative project in her novels and my humanistic enterprise in this chapter.

Rather than social science, I approach *poor migrants* through Gordimer's stories. The stories of political refugees and migrants fleeing war have often garnered the most attention, but the vast majority of migrants flee because of poverty—they are poor migrants. In relationship to migration, MIA poses the question: "Broke people (What's up with that?)." Broke people—who are they? Where do they come from? What motivates them? How are they comprehended and represented by those who are not broke? The argument that follows explores aspects of these questions.

July's People narrates the predicament of a liberal white woman (Maureen Smales) displaced into unfamiliar spaces in the company of a man of a different race. A civil war instigated by advancing revolutionary antiapartheid forces compels Maureen to flee into a rural "Bantustan" from her comfortable home with her family (architect husband Bam and two children) and her black servant July. Maureen and Bam are wealthy white South Africans benefiting from apartheid but opposed to it; now, forced to abandon their Johannesburg home and place themselves in the protective hands of July, to whose village home they have fled, they are brought up against their own shortcomings. *July's People* is rightly read as a devastating, if also empathetic, exploration of the limits of liberalism in apartheid South Africa—Maureen is the protagonist of the novel, the character whose inexorably developing confrontation in exile with her own delusions of liberal tolerance we witness with exquisite intimacy.

July is a significant secondary character in *July's People*: significant enough to find mention in the title but not a character whose interiority—whose motivations and affective life—is given to us with the immediacy of Maureen's. As Rob Nixon notes, "Somewhat like the Africans in *Heart of Darkness*, if less absolutely, July exists primarily as a foil for an inquiry into the character of white civilization once the fabric of civic life has been rent."⁵ For the purposes of this chapter, however, July is the more important character; where Maureen is an exile and a refugee, July is a poor migrant. "Under the migrant labor system [of apartheid South Africa]," Nixon also notes, "[July] divides his life between the townships and a remote Bantustan where his family resides, but which he manages to visit only once every two years."⁶ The novel contrasts two displacements—the (as far as we can tell, temporary) displacement of Maureen into exile and the (permanent) displacement of July into economic migrancy, wherein he is permitted to live in Johannesburg as the Smales' house servant

for years on end but not permitted to bring his family. Thus, a kind of oxymoronic but nevertheless real permanent migrancy is imposed on July.

As I have noted, *July's People* does not explore July's interiority with the urgency given to Maureen. The novel is aware of the dangers of trying to render July's interiority. In a key scene that appears toward the end of the novel, Gordimer has Maureen confront finally, with her delusions of liberal tolerance stripped away by her long sojourn in her servant July's village, the cost to July of his life of displacement. Slowly, as the civil war drags on and they are unable to return to their erstwhile life in Johannesburg as they had originally expected to, power has been shifting from Maureen and Bam to July. Now, Maureen comes to confront July about evidence that he has engaged in petty pilfering during his years working for her: "Why did you take rubbish?"⁷ Clearly, the rubbish is only an excuse; the real subject of their quarrel is their changed relationship. Maureen does not expect the response from July that follows:

Suddenly he began to talk at her in his own language, his face flickering powerfully. The heavy cadences surrounded her; the earth was fading and a thin, far radiance from the moon was faintly pinkening parachute-silk hazes stretched over the sky. She understood although she knew no word. Understood everything; what he had had to be, how she had covered up to herself for him, in order for him to be her idea of him. But for himself—to be intelligent, honest, dignified for her was nothing; his measure as a man was taken elsewhere and by others.⁸

Permanent migrancy—living in Johannesburg but not really resident there—has made July opaque to Maureen in ways she has not even understood. She only thought she knew him; now she realizes that his true "measure as a man was taken elsewhere," in his "Bantustan" village from which he came and to which he returned once every two years. It takes Maureen's own displacement to July's village for her to realize "what he had had to be." Migrancy imposes a divided self on July that is captured in the novel by the paradoxes of his very name. July is a name given to him in Johannesburg by his employers. His real name, the name by which he is known back in his village, is Mwawate. It is not until she arrives in July's village that Maureen is made aware that July has another, truer, name.

The economic institutions of apartheid depend, the novel makes clear, on the creation of a migrant labor pool of young men without family. Apartheid South Africa's infamous pass laws are at the foundation of July's servitude. Without the papers demanded by the apartheid pass laws, July can neither move about Johannesburg nor even reside there. Permanent migrancy keeps July subservient and his labor available to Maureen Smales, and it is the progressive dissolution of this permanent migrancy that finally undoes the old power relationship between them. July and Maureen realize as the days of exile turn into weeks that there will be no going back to the Johannesburg in which Maureen was "madam" and July "boy" (though Maureen

always resisted using that particular term of belittlement, preferring rather to rename Mwawate July).

In her exile, Maureen is made to understand, perhaps for the first time in her life, what it means to be poor. Gordimer broaches this subject by invoking the paper currency with which Maureen has habitually bought what she has needed in Johannesburg. After only a few days in July's village, Maureen loses her previous sense of money: "Bundles of notes were bits of paper, in this place; did not represent, to her, the refrigerator full of frozen meat and ice cubes, the newspapers, water-borne sewage, bedside lamps money could not provide here."⁹ But Maureen's fresh and surreal sense of money's incapacity to "represent" commodities of various kinds that she has previously taken for granted is not shared by her new neighbors in July's village:

But [money's] meaning was not dissociated, for July's villagers. She saw how when she or Bam, who were completely dependent on these people, had nothing but bits of paper to give them, not even clothes—so prized by the poor—to spare, they secreted the paper money in tied rags and strange crumpled pouches about their persons. They were able to make the connection between the abstract and the concrete. July—and others like him, all the able men went away to work—had been sending these bits of paper for so long and had been bringing, over fifteen years (that meant seven home-leaves), many things that bits of paper could be transformed into, from the bicycle Bam had got for him at a discount to the supermarket pink glass teacups.¹⁰

Money in a "Bantustan" is not to Maureen what it is to July. A life led under the pitiless strictures of the migrant economy provides July and his family insight into money in such a context that is not (yet) Maureen's.

Thus, in a novel that takes its epigraph from Antonio Gramsci, Gordimer explores the political economy of migrant labor. In the first volume of *Capital*, Marx identifies money as "the ultimate product" of the process of "the circulation of commodities" when regarded from the perspective of "the economic forms brought into being."¹¹ Money, he observes, is "the commodity which functions as a measure of value."¹² It is the endpoint of the progressive veiling of labor power—that is, the progressive obfuscation of a human capacity through labor to produce objects with use value—that he names commodity fetishism. In the passage cited above, Gordimer reveals how the power of money to be the measure of value is not natural, but rather contingent on social location. In her old life in Johannesburg, money's power was self-evident to Maureen; it isn't in July's village, where it loses its capacity to represent and is rendered "bits of paper." Not so for July or his fellow villagers, who are after all migrant laborers themselves or else relatives of migrant laborers dependent on the money sent back. Leading lives of toil, they are much better versed in the political economy of migrant labor and thus able to look behind the veil of commodity fetishism than Maureen.



Like Maureen in *July's People*, Julie in *The Pickup* embodies the predicament of a liberal white woman displaced into unfamiliar spaces in the company of a man of a different race—if in *July's People* Maureen Smales is forced to flee into a rural “Bantustan” from her comfortable home with her black servant July, in *The Pickup* Julie “picks up” Abdu, falls in love with him, and follows him to his homeland when he is forced to leave South Africa for not having the proper papers. *The Pickup* presents the love story of Abdu, an undocumented migrant in South Africa from an unnamed but vaguely Middle Eastern country, and Julie Summers, the restless daughter of a rich white South African family. Published in 2001, years after Nelson Mandela had been released from prison and apartheid had ended, *The Pickup* is a subtle exploration of a new South Africa coming into being on the ruins of apartheid.

The Pickup is a timely—given the echoes between the novels perhaps even deliberate—updating of *July's People*. Where Maureen is a refugee from the violence accompanying an imagined end to apartheid, Julie is a reverse migrant of a kind, albeit an enormously privileged one. *The Pickup* is, more fully than *July's People* could ever be, a postapartheid novel. *July's People*, written when apartheid still existed, can only *imagine* an end to apartheid. *The Pickup*, on the other hand, takes as fact the existence of a South Africa free of apartheid and rendered “normal” by the putative transcendence of a violently constitutive black-white dichotomy. This putative transcendence does not, however, make the novel postracial—for it only frees Gordimer’s narrative to be displaced onto the globalized, and equally racialized, terrain of international economic migration. As Sue Kossew noted in an essay that responded to the novel soon after its publication:

In addition to the excitement of cross-cultural exchanges whereby South Africans are now welcomed abroad after the period of cultural boycott, the new South Africa also opened its borders to a wide range of peoples, many of them settling as so-called “illegal immigrants” in the big cities like Johannesburg. This influx of people has, according to Gordimer, given rise to reactions of xenophobia and resentment among local people, despite the fact that, as Gordimer has pointed out, “apart from South African Africans we are all immigrants here.”¹³

It is in this context (the context of a new South Africa) that the novel’s narrative, released from the iron grip of apartheid, casts fresh light on the relationship between race, migration, and poverty in a globalizing world.

This fraught relationship as presented in *The Pickup* reveals what might be regarded as an unusual and unpredictable view of Africa as a continent. Throughout the novel, the striving Abdu’s one desire is to escape his impoverished homeland by way of migration to the wealthy West, though this attempted migration takes him initially to South Africa. *The Pickup*, like all

of Gordimer's best fiction, resists easy generalization—rather than a black migrant *from* South Africa, the novel presents the less familiar but equally relevant figure of a nonwhite migrant *to* South Africa. Thus, Gordimer's narrative illuminates and critiques assumptions about poor migrants in the context of postcolonial South Africa—large numbers of poor migrants end up, the novel reminds us, not in Europe or North America but rather in other poor postcolonial countries.

Abdu's repeated attempts to migrate out of his homeland are linked to what he regards as his limited options in his homeland—at home he can work as a mechanic for his uncle or else remain unemployed. Nevertheless, the novel is clear that migration is a choice—Abdu's choice. Julie, who accompanies Abdu to his homeland from South Africa, cannot understand his desperate desire to leave, and indeed chooses to remain in her lover's homeland when, at the end of the novel, Abdu manages with Julie's help to get a visa to the United States. Thus by the end of the novel, Julie too has become a migrant—a white migrant from South Africa who makes the opposite journey from Abdu. Julie cannot understand why Abdu would choose to be an immigrant—even, in the past, an “illegal immigrant,” in the language of some of the characters of the novel—over being with his family in the land of his birth.

Julie's disinclination to accompany Abdu to America's underbelly as the wife of a poor nonwhite migrant is the result of a greater knowledge. Julie knows the reality of race in the United States better than Abdu—she knows that Abdu is fated to be slotted into the bottom rungs of the American economy because of where he is from and what he looks like. This too is made perfectly clear in the novel.¹⁴ Julie's white mother has previously migrated from South Africa to the United States, where she has made a prosperous life for herself with her new husband, Julie's stepfather. But neither Abdu's race nor his command of English is the same as Julie's mother's, and Julie knows what he doesn't—that he cannot expect the same fate as Julie's mother in America. Indeed, part of Julie's desire to stay back while Abdu migrates is based on her refusal to see the man she loves humiliated in America because of his race: “And again: America, America. The great and terrible USA. . . . *That's where the world is.* He thinks *I* don't know; *he* doesn't know. He is standing before her, conjured up by her rage against all that threatens him, waits for him.”¹⁵

Abdu, as I have noted, has none of this racial knowledge that, ironically, his white lover Julie has. Abdu sees his homeland as a “dirty place” filled with the “dirt of poverty.”¹⁶ We are told by the narrator that when he sees his people, “his face drew up in a grimace of pain and anger at the nature of their existence.”¹⁷ Abdu's blindness regarding his homeland should not be understood simply as ignorance. In its own (paradoxical) way it too is insight—an experiential insight into his homeland that Julie can never have. Even as he thinks of his homeland as dirty, Abdu has an acute understanding of “the dirt of the politics of the rich.”¹⁸ Abdu, the novel underscores, is not a naive and ignorant protagonist. He is not lacking in an acute consciousness of the inequities of the world. But why then does Abdu want to immigrate? The novel suggests that

in a world that associates wealth with consumption and ownership of objects, Abdu can only experience his homeland and his own existence as poor.

In this regard, Nadine Gordimer makes much narrative use of the desert location of Abdu's homeland: "[Julie] has come to the sudden end of the street: there is the desert. Its immensity has put a stop to the houses, the people: go no farther with your belching cars, your bleary lights in the majesty of darkness, your street vendors and broadcast babble; go no further in your aspirations,"¹⁹ and later, at a crucial moment in the narrative when Julie resolves to help Abdu in his quest to immigrate, though she herself will not go with him: "She sat on until the tumult slowly cleared within her, disentangled. The sands of the desert dissolve conflict; there is space, space for at least one clear thought to come: arrived at."²⁰ Abdu experiences the desert as empty and barren even as Julie and some of the other characters—some of Abdu's own kinfolk—experience beauty in it. The desert is beautiful in its own right; it is also a symbolic space beyond the reach of commodification. Which is the true desert, the novel seems to ask, the expanse of sand at whose margin Julie often lingers, or the commodity-saturated modern life that is such an allure to Abdu and that Julie has chosen to leave behind?

The opposition—natural desert versus modern sociality—is an old and familiar one, perhaps even a cliché. Gordimer saves the binaristic opposition from declining into truism by exploring Abdu and Julie's differing responses, as the passages cited above already reveal. In this context, it would be a critical mistake for us to judge Abdu "wrong" in his experience of his desert homeland—after all, he is quite correct in his assessment that his future prospects in his homeland are severely limited and that his personal ambition can find no outlet there. Rather than right and wrong knowledge, truth and error, Gordimer presents us with Julie's and Abdu's alternative experiences through the artifice of fiction. Both their experiences are true in their own ways—and that's the kind of truth novels are good at revealing.

Abdu and his relatives, we are told, regard immigration as "achievement."²¹ To *find* entry, or if necessary to *force* one's entry, into a rich country—that in itself is the achievement. Gordimer portrays this aspiration of immigration with both sympathy and skepticism—sympathy for Abdu's desperate longing, skepticism regarding America's ability to accommodate this longing. A great deal of the narrative of *The Pickup* revolves around Abdu's endless quest for documents—visas, passports, and identity papers. It is fitting that a writer who trained a critical eye on the pass laws of apartheid in *July's People* should show a similar sensitivity regarding the global pass laws that Abdu encounters in his aspirational journey to better himself. In a brief but crucial scene in the middle of the novel, Gordimer also explores the notion that as an aspirational goal, immigration substitutes for revolution. The restless young men, Abdu's friends, talk—talk of revolution or else immigration: "Three—like himself—have been declared illegal and deported, back to this place, from the countries they managed to enter and work at whatever they could turn a hand to. They talk until late in order not to go home to the family warrens

they escaped once, and to which they have been returned like dead letters—illegals have no fixed address, no identity.”²² *The Pickup* was published before 9/11 and would, no doubt, have been different if Gordimer had been able to rewrite the novel after an event that proved so catastrophic to so many people around the world; nevertheless, the novel still shows an awareness of the possibilities for extreme social disaffection within the unnamed Middle Eastern country depicted in the novel.

Just as in July’s village, in Abdu’s country there is the same privation that everywhere accompanies poverty. The smallness of poverty, as I have noted, drives Abdu crazy, makes him acutely aware of “the dirt of poverty.”²³ Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that Abdu is not as poor as July. The ratio of desire to need in the quest to migrate—ratio perhaps, but hardly a matter of rational calculation—is greater in Abdu’s case than in July’s. At one point, Abdu’s uncle offers him a substantial position in his garage; Abdu refuses it, preferring to pursue his dreams of migration to the West. Gordimer never represents July as having a similar choice. The factors driving the migration of the poor are varied, as varied as the poor themselves. There are commonalities, but also differences that are the result of both different histories and the idiosyncrasies of individual lives.

At one point in *The Pickup*, the narrator muses, “To discover the exact location of a ‘thing’ is a simple matter of factual research. To discover the exact location of a person: where to locate the self?”²⁴ Where, indeed, to locate the self of the poor migrant? This is one question—for the displaced white female protagonists Maureen and Julie pose others equally or more important—that animates *July’s People* and *The Pickup*. July and Abdu, Mwawate and Ibrahim to their own people, identified in the titles of their novels (Mwawate as July and Ibrahim as “the pickup”), provide two explorations of this question.



Two important works of history—*Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* by Mahmood Mamdani and *Precarious Liberation: Workers, the State, and Contested Social Citizenship in Postapartheid South Africa* by Franco Barchiesi—can help us contextualize the migrant stories of July and Abdu as Gordimer tells them. In *Citizen and Subject*, Mamdani devotes a chapter to migrant workers in apartheid South Africa. South Africa under apartheid, he argues, managed its political economy by establishing rural hinterlands under the governance of Native Authorities that were separated from urban communities under the dominance of white capital. Mamdani argues that this arrangement was a legacy of “indirect rule” in colonial Africa—a South African adaptation of a system of governance perfected by colonial regimes, especially the British. “Indirect rule,” arrived at gradually in colonial Africa, bifurcated the colonial state between an urban space governed by laws and a rural space ruled by native custom. Apartheid borrowed from this colonial principle of governance to institute a similar separation between city and country.

The thrust of this principle of governance in South Africa, Mamdani writes, was the creation and management of a migrant laboring population for an apartheid political economy. The class of African workers thus produced was both displaced and highly regulated. “Migrant labor was,” Mamdani notes,

semicoerced and semiservile . . . Central to . . . [the production of such labor] in South Africa was the Native Land Act of 1913, which legalized the earlier theft of land, created a huge marginal peasantry, and left it with little option but to turn into a captive labor force. Then there was a complex set of pass laws that simultaneously prohibited blacks from moving about the country to get the best job on the best available terms in a free market and branded those without employment as vagrants. For those who did take on employment, there was the Masters and Servants Act, which made it a criminal offence to break a labor contract, and a panoply of labor legislation that prohibited blacks from doing skilled work in most workplaces.²⁵

It is this very system of displacement *off* the land and *into* the workplaces of apartheid that July embodies in his person. Once subsistence through farming in the village is made impossible, July is “freed” to become a laborer under apartheid conditions. At the same time, the condition of permanent migrancy imposed on him by pass laws severely curtails the terms under which he can reside and labor in the city. As we have seen, his family remains in his village, rendering the city at best a temporary home for July.

The transition to a postapartheid society complicated this system of migrant workers, but the problem of managing labor in the “new South Africa” remained. In *Precarious Liberation*, Franco Barchiesi argues that the fight against apartheid involved a “redemptive” promise to deliver full citizenship in a free South Africa through properly compensated work:

The connections of citizenship and labor are vital to an understanding of the redemptive message of South Africa’s democratization. The rise of the ANC [African National Congress] to power following the first democratic elections of April 1994 announced that work, emancipated from the shame and violations of the past, could now contribute to democratic nation-building as the formerly oppressed rightfully reclaimed their land and an equitable share of the wealth they produce. . . . Work, in brief, promised to infuse democratic citizenship in the “new South Africa” with unprecedented social and ethical qualities.²⁶

Barchiesi goes on to explore the multiple significations of work in postapartheid South Africa in the aftermath of this redemptive promise. The incomplete fulfillment of the promise, he argues, inevitably strained the bond between liberation, citizenship, and work established by the resistance to apartheid. It is

within this transformed but nevertheless strained postapartheid political economy that we find Abdu as *The Pickup* opens.

If through the figure of July, Gordimer uncovers the regulative mechanisms of the apartheid state, she explores the very similar mechanisms of the globalized world through the figure of Abdu, now placed within a “new South Africa” in a manner that silently instigates comparison between the political economy of apartheid and of the globalized world. Both July and Abdu are poor migrants, but there are vast differences between them. Abdu is not South African, not even African, not a “legal” resident, and certainly not a citizen—he is, by definition, excluded from the redemptive promise of work in postapartheid South Africa. He lives in the shadows of the “new” South African society, apparently postracial now but with unresolved tensions. What is his place in this new South Africa? It is not clear. When the novel opens, Julie’s car has broken down in a part of the city that the narrator describes as “a bazaar of all that the city had not been allowed to be by the laws and traditions of her parents’ generation.”²⁷ Things have changed after apartheid, and yet they haven’t. The men who surround Julie in this part of the city are poor and black, and she is from a part of the city that is rich and white. Into this postapartheid black-and-white reality Abdu the Arab, the “illegal immigrant,” intrudes. Certainly, he is not July, a black African indigenous to South Africa; nevertheless, like July, he is defined substantially by his poverty, his labor, and his migrancy.

July and Maureen, Abdu and Julie—it is not difficult to recognize *The Pickup* as Nadine Gordimer’s canny rewriting of *July’s People* in the context of a new South Africa that is now postapartheid but also, at the same time, newly connected to a globalized world.²⁸ Through these pairs of characters Gordimer forces comparisons and propels scrutiny of the affective condition of migrancy in first a colonial (*July’s People*) and then a postcolonial (*The Pickup*) context. If we recognize that the political economy of the apartheid state controls July’s life through pass laws and the creation of artificial boundaries (and thus “Bantustans”), what are we to make of the visas and immigration documents about which Abdu obsesses and which rule his life as much as the pass book ruled July’s? We regard July as native to South Africa, though the apartheid state, as Mamdani shows, borrows from the colonial governance practices of “indirect rule” to deny him native rights in the urban space in which he labors. With regard to Abdu, we might ask whether it is truly the case that Abdu can “belong” only to that desert land in which he was born and where he finds his desires thwarted. Is he truly unwanted in the affluent West to which he so desperately wants to migrate—or is it rather the case that the global movement of poor migrants, like migration under the conditions of apartheid, is meant to produce a class of permanently displaced vulnerable workers? *The Pickup* does not provide us with answers to these questions but it certainly poses them with great potency.

I began with two songs from Tony Allen and MIA that direct attention to the hopes and the heartbreak of poor global migrants. Even as Allen implores his migrants not to take the “boat journey,” MIA asks “Broke people (What’s

up with that?).” In making my arguments, I have tried to take both Allen’s imploration and MIA’s question seriously. *Broke*, in MIA’s question, should, of course, be read both as *without money* and as *broken*; at the same time, it’s worth noting that the aesthetic quality of the images of her video and of the migrants in them often belies notions of brokenness.

The questions regarding African and global migration in relation to poverty posed by Allen and MIA are complex—complex in a way elucidated also by the two novels of Nadine Gordimer at the heart of this chapter. These novels explore the paradoxical reality of some kinds of migrancy. We are generally tempted to regard migration as a linear process (linear both in space and in time). Once a migration is *completed*, we are inclined to say, the migrant has *arrived* in a new place. Gordimer shows that this is not always the case—some migrations are circular, involving many departures and returns (Abdu); and others result in a kind of permanent—permanently aborted—condition of migrancy (July). There are neither completions nor arrivals. In Gordimer’s novels, the striving poor, driven by necessity and by dreams of a better life, migrate but in ways that complicate easy notions of migration.

Notes

1. See here for a review by Robin Denselow: <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/oct/16/tony-allen-film-of-life-cd-review>.

2. Wikipedia, “Tony Allen (musician),” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tony_Allen_\(musician\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tony_Allen_(musician)).

3. “Poverty: Review.” A lot depends, of course, on how you count and how you interpret figures. I share these figures to give only a general sense of what is at issue in discussing poverty in a global context.

4. Grace Davie, *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa: A Social History of Human Science 1855–2005* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1.

5. Rob Nixon, “Nadine Gordimer,” in *Scribner Writers Series*, ed. George Stade (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1992), 18.

6. *Ibid.*, 17.

7. Nadine Gordimer, *July’s People* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 152.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*, 27–28.

10. *Ibid.*

11. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage, 1976), 248.

12. *Ibid.*, 227.

13. Sue Kossew, “Beyond the National: Exile and Belonging in Nadine Gordimer’s *The Pickup*,” *Scrutiny2: Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa* 8, no. 1 (2003): 21.

14. Nadine Gordimer, *The Pickup* (New York: Straus and Giroux, 2001), 230.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Ibid., 115.
17. Ibid., 115–16.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., 167.
20. Ibid., 231.
21. Ibid., 266.
22. Ibid., 176.
23. Ibid., 115–16.
24. Ibid., 47.
25. Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Later Colonialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 227–28.
26. Franco Barchiesi, *Precarious Liberation: Workers, the State, and Contested Social Citizenship in Postapartheid South Africa* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2011), 3–4.
27. Gordimer, *The Pickup*, 5.
28. The same thought occurs to Sue Kossew, whom I cite above in n. 23.

Reimagining Blackness in a Hybridized and Racialized Space

The Visual Landscapes of the Peruvian District of El Carmen, Chincha

Gilbert Shang Ndi

An image is a mental or visual representation of an entity, idea, or phenomenon. It represents/encapsulates something, but it is not an end in itself. Rather, it points to something else of which it stands as a symbolic connotation. Images constitute an inalienable component of the human psyche insofar as they underlie the way we make meaning of the world; our relation to others; and the social, economic, and political regimes under which we find ourselves. The question of visual representation is crucial to the perception of minority communities that are often relegated, obscured, and misrepresented in mainstream society and media. Peruvian society falls within that category given that in spite of considerable progress in minority representation in that country, “it still has a colonial social stratification where segregation and racism remain as a part of the national identity.”¹ However, the dominant image and imagination of minority groups and their cultures do not go uncontested. With respect to the Peruvian district of El Carmen, this chapter examines how the Afro-Peruvian population engages in visual self-representation in the domains of gastronomy and music to combat denigrating images by the dominant mestizo or Creole population. Given the centrality of the Afro-Peruvian population in the country’s music and gastronomic cultures, visual codes associated with these key domains offer far-reaching implications for practices of self-representation. This chapter explores the visual signs of El Carmen’s public spheres and house museums that highlight the cultural survival and resilience of Afro-Peruvian community in a culturally hybrid space. Secondly, it examines

the cultural impact of black migrants on El Carmen. In order to fully situate the representational significance of the visual representations discussed in this chapter, it is necessary to probe into the racial and historical background of Peru, a society whose contemporary racial and social relationships are characterized by racist ideologies, forced immigration (slavery), exploitation, and marginalization.

Forced Migration and Black Slavery in Peruvian History

In terms of racial composition, Peru is one of the most diverse countries in Latin America. As a territory whose precolonial history dates back to the indigenous Indian kingdoms, the last of which was the Inca empire, the racial mix of Peru can be explained through a series of historical processes such as the Spanish conquest (and settlement since 1529); the forced immigration of enslaved Africans; the advent of Chinese indentured laborers and other successive waves of migrants from Asian and European countries. These historical waves of massive human movements, triggered by a multiplicity of factors, have converted Peru into a melting pot of racial cohabitation. Thus, racial hybridity is the norm and the starting point from which to understand key aspects of Peruvian “identity.” In a discussion of the cultural effects of such historical phenomena, Julia Maribel Sanchez Palominio affirms that “this phenomenon of decentralisation and decentering has led to a complex reconfiguration of cultural and natural identities which manifest as hybrid, fragmentary and transitory, favouring encounters and fusions between traditional cultural identities.”² However, the racial rainbow nation has its own share of sociopolitical and economic fractures that at various points of its history have caused racial tensions to surface. This history can be explained by the fact that the very constitution of this rainbow nation uncovers a history of oppression, rejection, divide and rule, enslavement, and the development of a class system papered over strict racial fault lines. It is not an overstatement to affirm that “Indianness” and “blackness” (and to some extent “Asianness”) persist as markers of social and economic disadvantage, systematically associated with backwardness and racial inferiority. On the other hand, “whiteness,” “Creoleness,” and to some extent “Asianness” are considered markers of progress and modernity. Carlos Aguirre underscores that “‘cholo,’³ ‘ser-rano,’⁴ ‘indian,’ or ‘negro’ are expressions employed on a daily basis to refer pejoratively to persons of indigenous and African origin.”⁵ Not only are the Afro-Peruvians identified as racially inferior, their contributions to all aspects of the country’s advancement are systematically overlooked: “Despite increasing awareness about Afro-Peruvians, their history and challenges still tend to be left out of most narratives and characterizations of the nation which minimizes their contributions to the making of Peruvian society—an uneven fusion of multiple traditions, including Indian, African and Spanish traditions.”⁶ Blacks in Peru are almost entirely descendants of enslaved Africans,

the earliest of whom date back to the period of conquest, i.e., the sixteenth century. However, the importation of enslaved blacks in Peru was rather timid in the early years of Spanish conquest with the major routes of the trade leading to the sugar-, coffee-, and cotton-producing parts of the Caribbean islands, Colombia, Ecuador, and Brazil. In the middle of the sixteenth century, the number of enslaved Africans on Peruvian soil numbered three thousand.⁷ The situation changed gradually up to the peak period of the eighteenth century. In the context of reforms by the Spanish Bourbon monarchy, many legal bottlenecks on the trade were repealed and the slave trade flourished in Peru. In the same dimension, Maribel Arrelucea Barrantes and Jesús Cosamalón Aguilar assert that in the eighteenth century, the importation of enslaved Africans rose due to the increased demand for plantation labor in the domains of sugar cane production and production of goods for local consumption such as liquor and fodder.⁸ Being a Pacific territory, the enslaved Africans were imported to Peru through the Atlantic transit ports of Cartagena (Colombia), Caracas (Venezuela), Buenos Aires (Argentina), and through Cuba and Puerto Rico.⁹ Barrantes and Aguilar underscore the rising proportion of blacks in Peru's capital city Lima, which consisted of about 42.6 percent in the mid-eighteenth century, reaching a peak of 45 percent at the end of that century, making Lima the highest concentration of blacks in any part of the viceroyalty.¹⁰ In the northern port city of Trujillo and its suburbs, the Africans made up nearly one-third of the population.¹¹

Most of the enslaved Africans on Peruvian soil were not transported directly from Africa. There was a distinction between enslaved people who came directly from Africa and those who were imported from the Caribbean islands. The *criollos* referred to enslaved Africans or progenies of enslaved Africans transported from Africa and resettled for a considerable period of time in the sugar plantations of the Caribbean islands. On the other hand, *bozales* were enslaved people imported directly from Africa, mainly from Guinea, Angola, Biafra, and Congo.¹² In terms of their African ethnic provenance, it is purported that many of the enslaved belonged to groups like Braa'n, Biafra, Berbesi, Jolofo, Mandinga, Nalu, Kasanga, Fula, Bioho, Folupo, Soso, Balanta, Mina, Kongo, Benguela, Alonga, Malamba, and Masongo.¹³ Enslaved Africans in Peru were numerically smaller and more culturally and linguistically diverse than those in neighboring countries; enslaved people from the same African country of origin found themselves scattered in various plantations all over coastal Peru. Thus, unlike those in Brazil, Cuba, and Colombia who could build relatively sizable and close-knit kinship groups based on their specific African communities of origin, the disparate provenance of enslaved Africans in Peru meant that they had neither common language nor could they lay claim to unified cultural practices. This entailed two things. Firstly, it was difficult to conspire and organize rebellions against their masters as was common in Colombia and Brazil. Secondly, this also meant that the elements of polyphony, hybridity, bricolage, improvisation, adaptation, and pastiche became part and parcel of the culture among the enslaved in Peru and their descendants.

It is within this complex context that the gastronomic and musical cultures evoked in this chapter can be adequately grasped.

By recent estimates, citizens of African descent constitute between 10 percent and 15 percent of the Peruvian population, significantly lower than in colonial times. However, in societies with long histories of racial prejudices, statistics and census results do not usually reveal the complete picture.¹⁴ This is due to the fact that identification with a particular racial or ethnic group might be considered as either detrimental or strategic to one's aspiration for social advancement. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the percentage of Peruvians of African descent has been historically in decline. Omar Hassan Ali advances a number of factors for this decline:

The ending of the slave trade . . . , the migration of indigenous peoples from the highlands to the coastal cities, and pressures to assimilate into the dominant society are all factors for the drop in the visible Black population. Adding to this was the increase of new immigrant groups, including Chinese indentured labourers after the abolition of slavery in 1854, followed by Italian, German, Polish, Czech and Japanese immigrants.¹⁵

The demographic distribution of the black population on the Peruvian landscape evolved immensely over time as a result of internal migratory patterns. Regions with a high concentration of blacks in Peru are centered around the sugar and cotton plantations of colonial and Republican Peru. Presently, the major Peruvian towns and districts with a significant black population include El Carmen, Chincha, the districts of La Victoria and Breña (in Lima), Piura, Lambayeque, Ancash, Ica, Arequipa, Ypatera, Chiclayo, Sanya, and Tacna. However, the demography of the black population in Peru has also been affected by rural exodus as a result of the search for employment, education, and better living standards. Thus, it is estimated that more than 55 percent of Afro-Peruvians are based in Lima and the central coast,¹⁶ including most especially Chincha.

El Carmen, the Black Community, and Cultural Hybridity

The district of El Carmen belongs to the province of Chincha, Department of Ica, Peru. Half of the district's twenty thousand inhabitants claim African ancestry. In colonial and Republican Peru, Chincha was a major base for sugarcane and cotton production. Unlike Lima, where enslaved blacks were mostly employed as domestic servants, in Chincha they were mainly employed as plantation laborers. During slavery, folk life in El Carmen centered around four plantations (so-called haciendas): San José, San Regis, Hoja Redonda, and Laran. At its height, the San José plantation included up to eight hundred men, women, and children working on the plantations.¹⁷ San Regis contained about six hundred slaves while the number was much less in Hoja Redonda

and Laran.¹⁸ Thus, the population of El Carmen is made up of descendants of these laborers and the black communities that developed in the neighborhood of the district due to the phenomenon of *cimarronaje*, whereby enslaved blacks escaped from the difficult labor conditions to set up independent settlements out of the reach of their captors. The settlements (usually scattered) are variably referred to as the *palenques*, known in Brazil as *quilombos*. Guayabo in El Carmen is a prototype of a suburb that traces its history to the *palenque*.

In the views of many historians of slavery and the slave trade in Peru, domestic servants were generally in a better social condition and could benefit from a more dignified treatment from their masters or mistresses compared to enslaved blacks employed in farm labor or in bakeries. However, given that the gamut of slaveholders in metropolitan Lima was wide-ranging from Creole, indigenous aristocracy, mestizo, and even some freed blacks, this statement needs to be taken with caution. Thus, it is important to understand the specific dynamics of slavery, and the different practices of slaveholders. Even on the plantations, many enslaved blacks were employed in various areas like carpentry, bricklaying, sewing, brewing, cooking, etc., at times simultaneously with their daily labor in the plantations.¹⁹ Though the conditions of life were tedious, the enslaved also enjoyed moments of relative clemency from their masters. The strict discipline and occasional freedom in the slave estates is symbolized through life in the *galpones*, the slave quarters. *Galpones* were spaces of chaos, marginality, and insalubrity but also of relative freedoms. In the specific case of the hacienda San José in El Carmen, Carlos Aguirre underscores,

The slave quarters constituted spaces of control and discipline where slave movements were highly limited. However, these spaces sometimes turned into some sort of “liberated territory,” a relatively autonomous space of socialization where slaves conversed, laughed, played, drank, fought and amused themselves in a rather relaxed atmosphere. Slaves from other estates, runaway slaves, bandits and lovers gathered there to socialise and relax. In some estates, slaves were permitted to organize feasts on the eve of public holidays.²⁰

These moments of relaxation and relative freedom enjoyed by the enslaved led to the development of a musical culture in El Carmen that has had a long-lasting impact on the Peruvian cultural landscape. Music became a channel through which the enslaved could express their spirit of community, of belonging to African cultures in the diaspora, and also articulate visions of social relationships and freedom beyond the system of bondage in which they found themselves. In the same vein, the composition of food eaten among the enslaved bordered on improvisation and bricolage through incredible mixtures of ingredients, a result of multiple concertations among the enslaved. The diet was composed mainly of carbohydrates, a source of energy that enabled the enslaved to be manually productive. However, they could supplement the official rations with foodstuffs they cultivated through

the small farm tracks conceded to them by their masters. Otherwise, they could also rob or steal them from the master's farm.²¹ The basic elements of their diet were corn flour, cassava, sweet potatoes, beans, and small pieces of meat. A typical meal was the *zango*, a stew made of corn, wheat, or cassava flour. Given their disparate provenance, their broths resulted from a variety of influences and cooking traditions that reflected not only the origins but the trajectories of the enslaved with respect to the forced migratory patterns. From this experience, a great culture of gastronomic experimentation developed out of necessity and marked the cultural syncretism that flourished in the quarters reserved for the enslaved.

When slavery was abolished in 1854 by Peruvian President Ramón Castilla, many enslaved blacks were liberated but were reemployed under scarcely improved working conditions by the very slave masters who were hard put finding other alternative and viable forms of cheap labor. Subsequent reforms of the Peruvian labor system, especially the land reforms introduced by President Juan Velasco Alvaró in the 1970s, led to improved labor conditions in this district through the formation of farm cooperatives. However, the habits of everyday life born out of a strenuous situation of slavery thrived and became the cultural identity of the black population. In present-day Peru, El Carmen positions itself as one of the major spaces of Afro-Peruvian cultural heritage and the preservation of memories of slavery and its aftermath.

With regard to gastronomy and music, black culture has been influenced by other waves of immigration from other parts of Peru. In the nineteenth century Chíncha witnessed a considerable Italian immigration with great impacts on its gastronomy, clothing, and wine cultures. On the other hand, increasing poverty and the acute consequences of the war launched by the guerrilla group, the Shining Path, in the 1980s led to rural exodus from the Andean hinterland to the Peruvian coastal towns and districts, including El Carmen. These developments considerably changed the demographic composition of El Carmen and compounded the cultural mix of the district without necessarily overshadowing its Afro-Peruvian identity.²² Eduardo Barriga Altamarino and Jorge Luis Lossio Chávez argue, "These changes and fusions amongst the population were expressed through several avenues, with gastronomy being the most visible. The gastronomy developed in El Carmen was the fusion of dishes by pre-Hispanic populations that lived in Chíncha with those of Africans, Italians, and more recently, immigrant Andean populations."²³ To these complex influences can be added those of Asian (especially Chinese) cuisine as underlined by Wilfredo Kapsoli²⁴ and Julio Roldán.²⁵ This background knowledge carries immense cultural signification as it certainly explains the eclectic mix that characterizes Afro-Peruvian cuisine and musical culture, with El Carmen claiming centrality in that culture. Thus, it is important to examine the way El Carmen, in spite of its hybrid culture, projects the Afro-Peruvian cultural identity and cultural heritage within the Peruvian nation in tacit or overt response to dominant discourses or images in a context where blackness is associated to a considerable extent with negative connotations.

Visual Culture and Representation

Before delving into the analysis of the images in *El Carmen, Chinchá*, it is important to understand the field of visual culture and its pertinence to comprehending the construction and representation of identity in images. As a branch of study pertaining to the arts, human and social sciences, visual culture is concerned with the decoding and understanding of visual images. In *The Sacred Gaze* David Morgan posits that “visual culture is what images, acts of seeing, and attendant intellectual, emotional, and perceptual sensibilities do to build, maintain, or transform the worlds in which people live. The study of visual culture is the analysis and interpretation of images and the ways of seeing (or gazes) that configure the agents, practices, conceptualities, and institutions that put images to work.”²⁶ Visual culture positions visual representation and perception as a primary source of constituting and ordering human experiences. As a systematic approach, it evolves against a backdrop of the relative marginalization of the visual with regard to the textual and the oral in the study of human history and social phenomena. Its central precepts are based on the fact that, far from playing merely auxiliary or illustrative roles in relation to the other forms of social articulation, visual representations are essential in determining meaning-making processes at the individual, local, and global levels.

Nicholas Mirzoeff believes the image boom of the modern and postmodern eras has not generated commensurate critical engagements with the question of images. Making the case for developing a systematic field of study aimed specifically at the study and analysis of visual images, he argues that “Observing the new visibility of culture is not the same as understanding it. Indeed the gap between the visual experience in contemporary culture and the ability to analyse that observation marks both the opportunity and the need for a visual culture as a field of study.”²⁷ In the past decades, the field of visual studies has developed immensely and has attracted critics from various disciplinary backgrounds ranging from the fields of semiotics, critical theory, cultural studies, performance studies, arts, media studies, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and psychology. Mirzoeff is of the view that visual culture is a “post-disciplinary” approach to social sciences and the arts since it is not hedged behind any disciplinary rigidity. Rather, it borrows from existing theoretical developments and brings them together in lively debates that can generate innovative ways of analyzing image productions in modern and postmodern societies. Underlining the essentially transdisciplinary nature of visual culture, David Morgan corroborates that

the study of visual culture is not a discrete or autonomous discipline, but an interaction among several existing disciplines or fields of study. Thus, when scholars study visual culture to explain why some aspect of the past happened the way it did, they operate as historians; when they look at images for the purpose of understanding a cultural practice or social institution, they act as anthropologists or sociologists.²⁸

The approach of visual culture critically interrogates the boundaries between high and low cultures, the distinctions between eventful and noneventful images, the hierarchies between professionally produced as well as amateur pictures, and the interactions between self-presentations at the individual and group levels. Visual culture is also an integrative approach as it underlines the interaction between the visual and other media of perceptions, especially textual and acoustic representations. All media are in some way mixed media and in most cases, images operate in a dynamic and interactive relationship with textual and audio productions. Thus, they are examined in relation to other forms of articulations of social experiences.

Gastronomic Culture: Visual Construction of Self and Other

Gastronomic practice is one of the areas where the Afro-Peruvian heritage is most visible. Chincha (and specifically El Carmen) is known for its food tourism whereby visitors choose from a rich variety of Afro-Peruvian cuisine. Thus, in El Carmen, gastronomy has become not only an indispensable element of touristic attraction but also a space for the diffusion of social and racial (self-) perceptions. The imagery surrounding the gastronomic sector constitutes important inroads into dominant perceptions of Afro-Peruvian identity within the frame of Peruvian nationality. This section examines a series of images of gastronomic spaces in El Carmen, Chincha, in the light of sociocultural expression of identity and the contestation of racialist perceptions.

Advertisement is one of the mediums through which perceptions of values and social acceptability or desirability are conveyed. In a racially complex society like Peru, the codes of advertisement can be a stage for the expression and contestation of subtle or overt racial stereotypes.²⁹ Advertisements reveal what is negated or otherwise condoned. Through a complex use of iconography and aesthetic imagery, advertising traditions can map, represent, or interrogate dominant trends. Thus, to some extent, advertisements can provide knowledge about society's sociocultural beliefs. The Afro-Peruvian professor and civil rights activist José Eusebio Campos Davila castigates the perpetuation of racism in institutionalized domains like the university, spaces that otherwise would be at the front line of the fight against racism in a modern society. Davila cites the example of a job advertisement by the Universidad Privada Telesup (Telesup Private University) in which the administrator is looking for a "receptionist of admirable character and light skin who is around 160cm tall."³⁰ Though the university later claimed that it was an error by their marketing department after the racist scheme behind the advertisement was unveiled, this example brings to the fore the underlying racial prejudices rooted in the mentalities of a large stratum of society, including those who control some of the key employment structures of the country. In addition to the racism in the job advertisement, the specification that the receptionist should be female also reveals a near global trend that projects the female body as an object of

commodification, entertainment, consumption, and desire, undermining her real productive strength. The female presence comes to represent the shining attractive surface, the *schein* (appearance), whereas the more substantive positions are most likely to be occupied by males.

The example highlights the fact that what is shown, concealed, or marginalized in advertisements can reveal a great deal about prevailing social habits, predilections, biases, be they those of the designers of the advertisements, or the value judgments and preferences of the society within which the publicity is visualized. Advertisements, then, are usually shaped by prevailing aesthetic codes. The heteronomic production and display of images around Afro-Peruvian gastronomic industry in El Carmen illustrate and at the same time interrogate this trend of thought, depending on who owns the images. Consider the images in figures 7.1, 7.2, and 7.3 below.³¹

The three images are signposts announcing the presence of a restaurant serving Afro-Peruvian dishes. However, there are rather different motifs underlining the portrayed images. Figure 7.1 is an icon based on exoticism and the grotesque, which offers a rather caricaturizing picture of the Afro-Peruvian. There is an implicit desire to represent the Afro-Peruvian as the strange “other” in the community. Thus, the appeal of the cuisine comes from the exotic, bizarre, and wildly different nature of the “other,” the very limit of an adventurous encounter with difference that produces pleasure. The Afro-Peruvian is thus figured as the “other” with whom “we” are bound to live. Such images are indicators of the racial biases at work in Peruvian society. The elements of incongruity, cursoriness, and excess exuding from this image corroborate Ciarlo’s claim in a study of black representation in colonial Germany where he posits that

caricature was no longer sold and consumed for its own sake—as an entertaining yet provocative carnival of absurd exaggeration. Instead, the commercialized caricature that emerged in advertising at the fin de siècle used those codes to confirm and correlate viewers’ judgments and prejudices, all in the effort to sell more products. Its critical edge was lost. This shift from critique to confirmation may be subtle, but the distinction lies at the heart of the difference between exaggerated communicative code and stereotype.³²

The traits of caricature and exaggeration are exploited in the straw figure in figure 7.1 to the maximum. The sexually ambiguous figure and the red lips are common features in black caricature whether it is blackface minstrelsy, Little Black Sambo stories, or a figure advertising Afro-Peruvian cuisine.³³ The stuff from which it is made—the straw—communicates the idea of a being devoid of substance, soul, or any form of anchorage. The excessive proportion of kinky hair and red ointment on the lips has a grotesque effect on the figure. Thus, what is meant to endow the figure with an element of beauty ends up turning the object into a pathetic figure of an abortive aesthetic quest. David Ciarlo



Figure 7.1. One of several straw figures near the market of Chincha indicating the presence of a restaurant serving Afro-Peruvian dishes.



Figure 7.2. One of the billboards advertising the Mamainé restaurant along the road from Chinchá to El Carmen.



Figure 7.3. Statuettes in front of the Africa Restaurant at the market square of El Carmen, Chinchá, Peru.

refers to the ambiguous affect produced by such a grotesque figure as similar to the “tension between difference and similarity, caricature and empathy.”³⁴ The incongruity between the conspicuously red, charcoal black, and white colors underscores the lack of style and proportion. Though they might not operate the same way in their distinctive contexts, the image in figure 7.1 is redolent of the Sambo and coon figures on the US landscape, a racist archetype of the lazy, asocial, maladroit, and imitative Negro. It is denigrating caricature that casts the Negro as a failed imitation of white middle-class gentility and debonair etiquette. From my interview with Guillermo Santa Cruz, one of the historians of black presence and heritage in El Carmen, Chinchá (see fig. 7.1.1 below), he contends that most of the restaurants with such “denigrating” images are owned by dominant mestizo or Creole businesspeople, even when they sometimes employ Afro-Peruvian cooks and waiters. While substantiating this claim in separate interviews, Susana Esther Cotito Cartagena and Lucía Ballumbrosio, both residents of El Carmen, refer to such images as “disgusting” and “nauseating.” Thus, there seems to be a general consensus among the Afro-Peruvian community in El Carmen that this figure communicates negative signs with regard to Afro-Peruvian identity. In *Bodyscape*, Nicholas Mirzoeff stresses the importance of images in attempts to visualize the bodies of the “other” as deficient in relation to the perfect bodies of dominant culture.³⁵ Parallel to the dominant images, there is the return of the gaze through practices of self-representation. In this way, through images, the colonizing and othering gaze can be revisited and deconstructed, opening new channels for self-perception and relationships between self and other.

The grotesque straw figure can thus be contrasted to figures 7.2 and 7.3. Figure 7.2 is the picture of Marina Esther Cartagena de Cotito, aka Mamainé, the owner of a restaurant called Mamainé, putting on an apron and a smile. The red-and-white colors of the advertisement correspond to the national colors of Peru. Through the advertisement, the positive affirmation of the Afro-Peruvian as a constitutive component of the Peruvian culture and identity is emphasized. Through realist aesthetics, figure 7.2 presents a more dignified imagery of the Afro-Peruvian woman and the Afro-Peruvian in general, though there is a clear indebtedness to the mammy figure represented in racist discourses such as plantation narratives that sketched the mammy figure as someone who loved serving her master and taking care of his children so as to justify the practice of slavery in a time of increasing abolitionist political agitation. Figure 7.3 consists of three statuettes located at the entrance to “el restaurante Africa” (Africa restaurant) to the left flank of the market square of El Carmen. The three marbled statues convey beauty, proportion, and elegance not only at the physical level but also a sense of internal tranquility. The contrast between the black color of the skin and the red lips is rather sober and subtle, contrary to the cursory and vehement *maladroitness* of figure 7.1. While the straw figure in Chinchá seeks to produce a caricaturized image of the Afro-Peruvian, Mamainé’s advert uses realism to present images of an enterprising Afro-Peruvian woman. The three statuettes present a more idealistic picture

of black women, in resonance with discourses of black beauty. The restaurants represented by figures 7.2 and 7.3 belong to Afro-Peruvians who display these advertisements not just for the purpose of business but also as an important site of self-representation. In this regard, figures 7.2 and 7.3 can be considered as counterimages and anti-icons³⁶ of the predominant racial stereotypes about the Afro-Peruvian in Peruvian society.

Vernacular Museums and the Perpetuation of Cultural Heritage

Given that visual representations in El Carmen are initiatives by individuals without any form of regulation, they present difficulties of categorization. The visual images vary between professional, amateur, and makeshift. Some of the key components of the house museums in El Carmen include the tactical and time-bound use of space; complementarity between the visual materials and the oral narratives; their semiformal context; the indeterminate boundaries between outside and inside; the lack of clear demarcation between the beginning and end of the guided tours and, last but not the least, the culture of tips as opposed to clear entry fees. Given these characteristics of culturally significant visual spaces in El Carmen, the practice of vernacular museums becomes crucial in perpetuating the sociocultural memory through individual and communal efforts. In an insightful paper on the persistence of the vernacular museum in the modern world, Maja Mikula contends that “despite the present day flurry of technologies of remembering and lavishly funded memory institutions, there is no doubt that the seemingly ‘ephemeral’ institutions such as the vernacular museum, dependent so much on performance, oral storytelling, living bodies and intimate interaction, nevertheless play an important role in maintaining and invigorating memory communities.”³⁷ Mikula goes on to argue that the vernacular museum does not concern itself with the ostentatious public image but rather surrounds itself with images of the hearth and a haptic and tactile experience, giving priority to “the private over the public sphere” and underlying the affective dimension of “hearth and home.”³⁸ The concept of “vernacular museum” fits into the practice in El Carmen where individual families seek to keep alive family heritage and communal memories through the use of images and oral narratives, in a sense of conviviality and without any clearly defined pecuniary objectives. Given their lack of elaborate structure and conflation of definite boundaries of meaning, it is difficult to pigeonhole vernacular museums. However, Mikula makes reference to Linda Young, who outlines the following taxonomy of house or vernacular museums in terms of their overall purposes:

Hero related house museums commemorate someone important, who either lived there or just passed through; collection based house museums display a collection of house objects worth conserving in their

original location; design based museums showcase objects based on the aesthetic or technical features of their design; house museums related to a particular historic event or process that evolved within the house itself; sentiment inspiring museums, which promote a positive spiritual or communal feeling; and country house museums, which are a “product of multigenerational development of the house, furnishings, collections, and gardens.”³⁹

The house museums in El Carmen convey in varying measures the various features that Linda Young identifies with the vernacular museum. I focus on the images that surround the house museums in El Carmen and the use of the media of oral telling and music to perpetuate communal memories, negotiate a sense of place, and enhance the self-image of the Afro-Peruvian.

Inside the Foyer Mamainé

In the analyses of figure 7.2 above, I focused on the display of the Mamainé restaurant in El Carmen as represented on the external landscape. Figures 7.4 and 7.5 take the viewer into the restaurant wherein the customer/tourist can be granted access to the proprietor’s family albums exhibited on the walls and the background of her restaurant enterprise. The foyer constantly plays host to Afro-Peruvian dance performances. While these are all business strategies, the music, food, wall albums, and oral narrations are quite informative with regard to Afro-Peruvian identity, memories, and sociocultural resilience.

Established in 1997, Mamainé is indisputably the most popular restaurant in the Guayabo neighborhood of El Carmen. Esther Cartagena (aka Mamainé) is its founder, proprietor, and manager. In an interview with her, she revealed to me that “Mamainé is the name of my great-grandmother,” a descendant of El Carmen slave plantation workers. Thus, naming the restaurant Mamainé is a means of perpetuating the memory of her ancestor, a figure of resilience in the family line and a descendant of enslaved Africans. Her restaurant is known nationwide after she won a gastronomic contest that entered her name in the Guinness Book of Records for making the biggest *carapulcra* in Peruvian history. This is clearly captured in figure 7.4. Carapulcra is a well-known and popular dish in Peru that is particularly connected to the history of El Carmen. From its ingredients and components, it is a symbol of hybridity in the domain of culture: “In contemporary times, dishes considered as typical of El Carmen include ‘carapulcra,’ ‘sopa seca,’ ‘humita,’ ‘dulce colado,’ ‘machadao de membrillo,’ ‘chapana,’ amongst others. A good example of the fusion of different gastronomic cultures is the carapulcra . . . derived from the words ‘cala’ which means ‘caliente’ (hot) and ‘purka’ which refers to the door of the barbecue furnace.”⁴⁰ With regard to the composition of the carapulcra and the depiction of black cultural memory in El Carmen, Florentino Arpa Calachua corroborates:



Figure 7.4. Poster on the wall of Mamainé showing the award she won for making the longest carapulcra in history. Top: “The longest carapulcra in Peru.” Bottom: “Thanks to the Mother’s Clubs of the District of El Carmen.”

It is a dish that captures the will to survive of the African descendants whereby they made use of the waste products of potatoes, giblets and pepper. The food of the slaves was made primarily from giblets rejected as waste by those who cooked for the whites. So, the Blacks had to gather the giblets to make their food out of them. In this way, the African traditional culture has come to have an immense influence on the Peruvian gastronomy.⁴¹

In a phenomenon that is also characteristic of the *anticucho*,⁴² which has become a delicacy in Lima, for example, a great gastronomic culture is born out of what used to be foodstuff rejected by the master and received as a means of survival by the enslaved.

What is significant about Mamainé’s restaurant is that it stands as a cultural melting pot. Her employees are white, black, Indian, and mestizo. Mamainé revealed to me that she formerly worked as a cook in a restaurant in Lima, but later decided to create and run her own business in 1997. Thus, she has transformed herself from an Afro-Peruvian female employee into a business force to reckon with in the social and economic space of El Carmen. Without running the risk of generalizing, it could be said that this self-assertive

businesswoman, the head of a business structure that has become a brand in itself, deconstructs the image of the Afro-Peruvian woman as one generally fit for menial and subsistence labor. The image of Mamainé completely transforms the stereotypical servant image of the black woman as a multiple marginalized and colonized figure in a society that is at pains to slough off racist, patriarchal, and caste mentalities.

In the sphere of racial iconology, a striking connection can be made here to the figure of Aunt Jemima in US advertisement industry in a racialized context, a transformation of the mammy figure, a symbol of a black woman's contented servitude. However, the advertisement here is cast in a different textuality as Mamainé is not simply objectified as an advertisement figure for the Peruvian food chains Molitalia (in fig. 7.2) and Anita (in fig. 7.4), but rather enters into a business partnership with the company given that her restaurant is what is prominently advertised in the image. In this regard, she displays agency and expediency in fostering her own business interests. Thus, in some way, it could be regarded as a subversion of the mammy figure as servant of her white mistress, given that here we are faced with a self-assertive woman with a business and political role. The visual presentation of Mamainé's restaurant equally contributes to this change of perception and the deconstruction of stereotypes attached to the female body as an object of mere consumption and appearance. With regard to the use of the female image in advertisement and the politics of gender marginalization, Susan Stewart asserts that "The conception of woman as consumer is no less fantastic or violent than its literalization in the *vagina dentata* myth, for it is a conception which functions to erase the true labour, the true productivity, of women. Yet this erasure forms the very possibility of the cycle of exchange."⁴³ The visual images of Mamainé underline the enterprising and productive dimension of the Afro-Peruvian woman, capable of assuming leadership positions and shaping perceptions in society. This point is very crucial if we take recourse in Carola Ramírez-Castello's assertion that Afro-Peruvians in Guayabo-El Carmen "do not want to be trapped in stereotypes. The Afro-Peruvians' images are of former slaves, football players, cooks, and performers; but they are saying: 'we are not limited to that.' They hope to be recognized as workers, families, professionals, students, or better yet, as a significant part of society."⁴⁴ While their musical and gastronomic heritage needs to be promoted, they do not need to limit the chances and life opportunities of the youth. To a certain extent, the musical and gastronomic boxes can become stereotypical and limiting in giving a full picture of the capacity of the Afro-Peruvians.

In another dimension, the restaurant can be considered as a private-public museum, a vernacular museum. Consider figure 7.5. The walls are aligned with a picture gallery that portrays the various stages of growth of both the restaurant and Mamainé's family. From its visual language, the pictures in effect tell a story of progress and success, conveying the image of a stylish, resilient, receptive, and industrious family. The foyer captures the spirit of conviviality that is associated with El Carmen in particular and Chincha in general. Visiting

Chincha or specifically El Carmen is often dubbed as visiting the *familia* (family) and Mamainé has projected her restaurant as the spatial materialization of the social warmth and receptiveness that go with the specific connotation of *familia* in El Carmen. Given the history of El Carmen discussed in the introductory part of this chapter, the necessity to stress a kind of “human family” based not on filiation but affiliation constitutes the basic ideology of social interactions in this space. José Campos insinuates that “the term *familia* goes beyond physical and territorial borders. It is a term that was born in Chincha but it has extended in all directions in the territory where Black and mestizo communities exist without distinctions.”⁴⁵ *Familia*, as idealistically utilized in this Chincha-El Carmen context, is connected with the idea of warmth, reciprocity, and mutual acceptance in spite of racial provenance and cultural differences. This enlarged sense of family, according to Ramírez-Castello, is what accounts for the sense of positive self and communal identification that one finds among the specific community of El Guayabo, as opposed to other blacks in other parts of the country, especially in metropolitan Lima.⁴⁶ In effect Mamainé, the combination of the person and the restaurant, has become a living culture icon in El Carmen thanks to her charisma, business skills, and general appeal. Her restaurant is a place of popular predilection and appeal. While this is good for her business, it also presents alternative images of the Afro-Peruvian woman. Figure 7.5 represents a younger Mamainé on the wall of her restaurant.

On the Public Sphere of El Carmen

The handwritten slate in figure 7.6 is one of the nonpermanent signs in El Carmen’s public square. The inscriptions on the makeshift signboard are highly connotative. There is a play on the connotation with regard to the terminology *Afro-descendiente* (literally Afro-descendant) and *Afrodisiaco*, a pun meant to produce a homophonous rapport with *aphrodisiaco* (aphrodisiac), the food or drink that stimulates sexual desire. The ludic element of this poster cannot be overemphasized. It certainly plays with the sexual stereotype associated with the virility of black men and the voluptuousness of black women. In this way, there is also an element of mimicry and tactical appropriation of racial stereotypes with the desire to enhance the commercial appeal of the liquor on sale. Thus, the stereotype held by the dominant group is interpolated for strategic and tactical ends.

The evocation of “Mandingo” alludes to the historical fact that the ancestors of most Afro-Peruvians came from the West African Mandingo ethnic group in Guinea. In Peruvian history and culture, according to Oswaldo Bilbao Lobatón and Newton Mori Julca, Guinea came to refer to Africa in general.⁴⁷ By implication, “Mandingo,” one of the dominant ethnic groups of Guinea, becomes metonymic of African ancestry of Afro-Peruvians in general. Stretching this metaphor further, one would recall the popular saying in Peru that “El que no tiene de Inga, tiene de Mandinga” (He who is not of Inga, is of Mandinga).



Figure 7.6. A handwritten slate at the central plaza of El Carmen. The poster reads “TUTUMA: AFRODISIAC LIQUOR BY UNCLE MANDINGO.”

Here one notices a morphological adaptation of the “Inca” into “Inga” to construct a rhyming pattern with “Mandi-nga.” The adage above constitutes a subversion of the phenomenon of identity denial among some Peruvian nationals whose strategic aspiration to whiteness entails a systematic concealment of their possible Andean or African ancestries. Peru thus becomes a country of *todas las sangres* (literally “all bloods”) to re-echo the title of a 1964 novel by the Peruvian novelist and anthropologist José María Arguedas.

The Ballumbrosio Family Museum

The living room of the Ballumbrosios (see figures 7.7, 7.8, and 7.9) plays host to the family museum, which exhibits the life achievements and family of the violinist and Afro-Peruvian “godfather” Amador Ballumbrosio (1933–2009). The walls of the living room are lined with an array of family albums, photos of concerts, painted portraits, and the numerous national and international awards won by Amador Ballumbrosio. Lucia Ballumbrosio, one of his daughters, usually acts as a guide for visitors, narrating the life and works of her father and establishing connections between the history of black settlement in El Carmen and the history of slavery in Peru in general. At the beginning of the guided tour around the family albums on the wall, Lucia asserts,

The music of my father was not merely commercial. His main aim was to perpetuate the culture of our people and to pass across a message of love, respect, and mutual acceptance. Truly the ancestors of the black community here have suffered but it was not the aim of my dad, who had firsthand information on the horrendous experiences from his grandparents, to pass on a message of bitterness and vengeance. Even in the middle of suffering, the slaves found the energy to sing, dance, and praise. That is how the tap dance, for example, was born, the key message being that of resilience.⁴⁸

Thus, the Ballumbrosio house/museum is not just about the successful music career of Amador Ballumbrosio but also about a vision of intercultural and interracial relations that thrive on tolerance and mutual respect. It is important to note that, in spite of the ambiguous relationship between the Catholic religion and the historical dynamics of enslaved Africans in the Americas (and in Africa), El Carmen is, like Peru, a very Catholic society. Ballumbrosio’s ethical worldview, as related by Lucia, is quite imbricated with the Catholic religion, and his message of love and forgiveness is partially informed by that mindset. However controversial religion might seem in the larger history of slavery and its impacts, the community of El Carmen is invested in the Catholic faith, and several Afro-Peruvian folkloric groups perform during religious ceremonies, especially at Christmas. *El atajo de los negritos*, one of the performances, draws many tourists to the district at Christmas. The parish of El Carmen is run by



Figure 7.7. Amador Ballumbrosio/family photos on the living room wall of his family home in El Carmen.

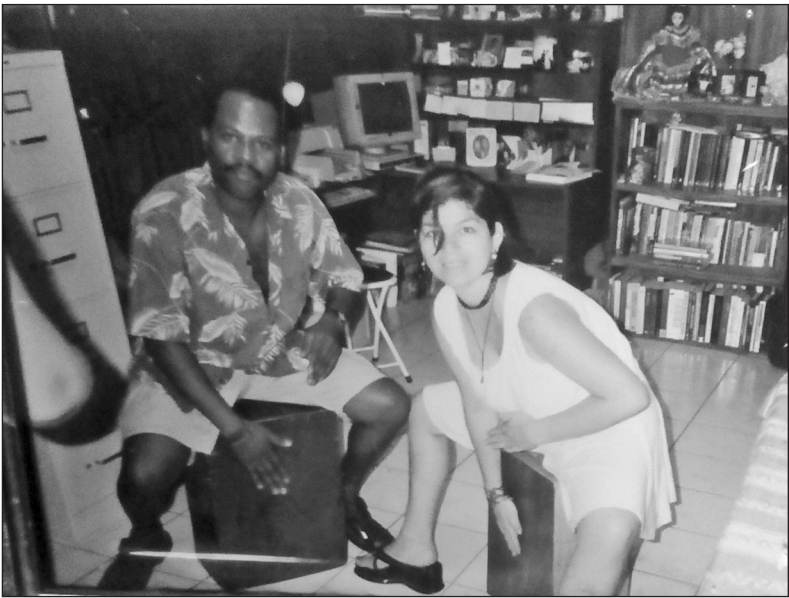


Figure 7.8. Filomeno Ballumbrosio, oldest son of Amador Ballumbrosio, and wife Giancarla di Laura exercising their drumming skills.



Figure 7.9. Josué Morón Ballumbrosio, grandson of Amador Ballumbrosio, playing the Afro-Peruvian drum as part of the guided tour of the house museum.

Rev. Ferdinand Atambise, an immigrant priest from the Democratic Republic of Congo in Peru since 2003.

In line with Linda Young's taxonomy above, the Ballumbrosio family house museum demonstrates that one of the functions of the vernacular museum is the reproduction of the memory of a hero. What needs to be added, though, is the manner in which succeeding generations emphasize the perpetuation of the values and vision of the deceased hero. The three pictures in this section capture three different generations. For instance, after the guided tour by Lucia Ballumbrosio, the young Josué (ten years old) and his cousin Luanda (nine years old), both grandchildren of Ballumbrosio, perform the *festejo* (party dance) and *zapateo* (tap dance). The family is seen as an important channel of cultural reproduction of the Afro-Peruvian in the absence of a strong formal government policy to create an appropriate museum to foster the cultural projects of minority communities. Lucia confesses, "Here there is no academy, no school, etc. My brother is struggling to open a cultural center, where the youth can learn more about their culture. But it is still a project in the making." However, before such worthwhile aspirations are realized, the family's house museum remains a crucial space for communal identity, memory, and resilience of minority cultures.

The House Museum of Guillermo Santa Cruz

Figures 7.10 and 7.11 portray the house museum of Guillermo Santa Cruz. He is a specialist and teacher of the violin and the *zapateo* (tap dance). He was a member of Amador Ballumbrosio's musical band before the latter's death. In terms of spatial practice, his house museum is quite similar to that of the Ballumbrosios. However, before getting into the spatial practice within the museum, it is important to note the cultural dynamics in the painting on the façade wall in which Santa Cruz is playing a violin. The violin is actually an Andean instrument. However, there is a difference in the manner of holding the instrument during a performance. The Afro-Peruvians hold the instrument closer to the shoulders while the Andean Peruvians hold it much closer to the forearm. Santa Cruz holds it quite close to his shoulder. As a man of both Andean and African origins, he is performing Afro-Peruvian identity in a hybrid space. It is interesting to note the positioning of Guillermo Santa Cruz given that he is both of Andean and African ancestries. Thus, his identifying more with the Afro-Peruvian cultural codes might not only be considered as strategic self-positioning with regard to the tourist industry but also as a testimony of the success of Afro-Peruvians in claiming pride of place in the cultural melting pot of El Carmen.

In Santa Cruz's house museum, a translucent curtain divides the space into two: the living room used by the family and the museum space, where he entertains the visitors with music and stories. As a folk historian, he has a broad knowledge of the historical dynamics of the black community of the El Carmen



Figure 7.10. The front view of the tourism center/house museum of Guillermo Santa Cruz.



Figure 7.11. The walls of the living room/museum of Guillermo Santa Cruz decorated with bits of newspaper articles, family albums, and awards.

district. This explains the flurry of newspaper articles pinned to his wall, which visitors can read. Describing the different versions of the tap dance in Peruvian musical space, Santa Cruz asserts that “The tap dance was first practiced amongst the enslaved Blacks of the San José estate. There is an Andean version of the dance but the body movement is not the same. Many people consider the Afro-Peruvian version livelier and involving better coordination of body movements. Others try to learn it but it does not just flow easily.”

Covering the wall are newspaper articles (comprising texts and images), framed awards/prizes, and photocopied pages from history books containing vital details. From these bits and eyewitness accounts, Santa Cruz pieces together accounts of the history and memorable events in El Carmen and Chíncha that have an impact on race relations. The narratives are told with a sense of affectivity, contrasting the dry and impersonal tonality of a standard historian. However, he does not solely rely on the oral or vernacular forms of narration. Rather, he owns a desktop computer and a number of CDs, which he plays for visitors to supplement his historical narratives, and visitors can also buy copies of his CDs.

In this chapter focusing on cultural practices that emerge from communities born out of forced immigration such as slavery, I have explored the landscape of El Carmen as a space at the crossroads of complex visual practices ranging from private and semipublic to commercial images. The discussions are premised on the assumption that social perceptions are socially determined and individuals and groups of people are shaped by specific visual histories or experiences that predispose them to look at certain images from well-determined angles. The aggregate effects of this visual complex define to a certain extent the intricate question of group identities, minorities, heritage, and memories. Since images encapsulate ideas, viewpoints, and perspectives, the agency of their selection, organization, collocation, timing, and display cannot be underestimated. Apart from the house museums wherein no clear economic motifs are perceptible, the commercial texts embedded in the images are undeniable. However, race questions and cultural motifs supersede these other possible avenues of interpretations. Thus, the images analyzed here can be considered as Afro-Peruvians’ attempts to reimage and resignify blackness as a positive self and group identification and to underline the contributions of the Afro-Peruvian community to the social, cultural, and economic well-being of Peru. As a centuries-old immigrant community, Afro-Peruvians in El Carmen have welcomed more recent immigrant groups and assimilated aspects of their attendant cultural practices while remaining conscious of their African ancestry. That notwithstanding, El Carmen has not only provided a space of cultural representation for Afro-Peruvians, the region serves as a claimed congenial home of a black community in the Americas.

Notes

1. Carola Ramírez-Castello, “Afro-Peruvian Identity and Its Connection with the Land: The Guayabo-Chincha Case” (master’s thesis, University of Kansas, 2008), 121.

2. “Como consecuencia de este fenómeno de desterritorialización y descentramiento, se ha abierto un complejo proceso de reconfiguración de las identidades culturales y naturales que, por ahora, se manifiestan como identidades híbridas, fragmentadas y transitorias, que favorecen el encuentro y la fusión de las identidades culturales tradicionales . . .,” translated from Julia Maribel Sanchez Palomino, “Aporte cultural de los afrodescendientes a las artes plásticas: una intergración de las razas en el Perú de Arguedas y Ricardo Palma,” *Historia del pueblo afroperuano y sus aportes a la cultura del Perú: Oportunidades para la reflexión intercultural con docentes, padres de familias y estudiantes* (Lima: Ministerio de Educación, 2013), 111.

3. *Cholo* refers to a person of mixed ancestry, especially one with both white and indigenous heritage.

4. *Serrano* refers to people who hail from the high Andean mountain chains of Peru.

5. “«cholo», «serrano», «indio» o «negro» son expresiones usadas cotidianamente para referirse de manera despectiva a las personas de origen indígena o afrodescendientes.” Translated from Carlos Aguirre, “Terruco de m . . . Insulto y estigma en la guerra sucia peruana,” *Histórica* 35, no. 1 (2011): 108.

6. Omar H. Ali, “Afro-Peru: A Legacy of Black Labor and Culture,” *ReVista: Harvard Review of Latin America* 14, no. 1 (2014): 5.

7. Oswaldo Bilbao Lobatón and Newton Mori Julca, “Los Afroperuanos: retrospectivo y situación actual,” in *Conocimientos desde adentro: Los afrosudamericanos hablan de sus pueblos y sus historias*, vol. 2, ed. Sheila White (La Paz: Fundación Pedro Andavérez Peralta, 2010), 91.

8. “En el siglo XVIII se amplió la importación de africanos esclavizados, debido sin duda al incremento de la demanda de mano de obra para el cultivo de la caña de azúcar y para satisfacer el consumo interno de productos tales como el aguardiente y la alfalfa.” Translated from Maribel Arrelucea Barrantes and Jesús A. Cosamalón Aguilar, *La Presencia Afrodescendiente en el Perú Siglos xvi–xx* (Lima: Ministerio de Cultura, 2015), 18.

9. Lobatón and Julca, “Los Afroperuanos,” 91.

10. Barrantes and Aguilar, *La Presencia Afrodescendiente*, 21.

11. Ali, “Afro-Peru,” 3.

12. Carlos Aguirre, *Breve Historia de la Esclavitud en el Perú: Una herida que no deja de sangrar* (Lima: Fondo Editorial del Congreso del Perú, 2005), 24. See also Eduardo Barriga Altamarino and Jorge Luis Lossio Chávez, “El Carmen: notas en torno a un distrito afroperuano,” in *Los afrodescendientes en el Perú republicano*, ed. Eduardo Huárag Álvarez (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 2014), 45.

13. Lobatón and Julca, “Los Afroperuanos,” 92.

14. Henry Louis Gates Jr. captures the situation very aptly in his documentary film series with the telling title *The Black Grandma in the Closet: Blacks in Latin America*, 2008.

15. Ali, "Afro-Peru," 4.

16. Lobatón and Julca, "Los Afroperuanos," 110.

17. Ali, "Afro-Peru," 1.

18. Ibid.

19. Aguirre, *Breve Historia de la Esclavitud*, 59.

20. "Los galpones constituían espacios que cumplían una función de control y disciplina y en los cuales se limitaba drásticamente los movimientos de los esclavos, pero se convirtieron a veces en un especie de 'territorio liberado,' un espacio de socialización relativamente autónomo, donde los esclavos conversaban, reían, jugaban, bebían, peleaban y se divertieron con cierta distensión. Hasta allí llegaban esclavos de otras haciendas, cimarrones, bandoleros, amantes para compartir momentos de socialización y relajación. En algunas haciendas se permitía a los esclavos organizar fiestas en los días vísperas de feriados." Translated from Aguirre, *Breve Historia de la Esclavitud*, 62.

21. Ibid., 63.

22. Altamarino and Chávez, "El Carmen," 58.

23. "Estos cambios y fusiones de la población se expresaron en diversos espacios, siendo la gastronomía la más visible. La gastronomía desarrollada en El Carmen es producto de la fusión de los platos de las poblaciones prehispánicas que habitaban en Chíncha con los platos de los africanos e italianos y más recientemente con los de las poblaciones andinas migrantes." Translated from Altamarino and Chávez, "El Carmen," 57.

24. Wilfredo Kapsoli, ed., *Emilio Choy Ma: Homenaje por el Centenario de su Nacimiento* (Lima: Universidad Ricardo Palma, 2015), 94.

25. Julio Roldán, *Peru: Mito y Realidad* (Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 2012), 266.

26. David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 33.

27. Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999), 3.

28. Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze*, 31.

29. David Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 3.

30. "repcionista de muy buena presencia, de tez clara y con un estructura de 1, 60." Translated from José Campos Davila, "La Lucha contra la discriminación: racismo, universidad y medios de comunicación," *La Opinión*, April 4, 2013, 3.

31. All photographs in this chapter are by the author.

32. Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire*, 255.

33. The Peruvian public sphere has experienced heated debates over media representations of the Afro-Peruvian. A case in point is the row caused by the campaign by civil rights activists such as Monica Carillo, who pressured the Frecuencia Latina channel to scrap the series featuring a stereotypical El Negro

Mama who was a caricature of Afro-Peruvian women. See BBC report: <http://www.bbc.com/news/10205171>. The vehement countercampaign for the program to be maintained as it was just a TV figure “portray how media can normalize popular perceptions of the majority classes.”

34. Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire*, 247.

35. Nicholas Mirzoeff, *Bodyscape: Art, Modernity and the Ideal Figure* (London: Routledge, 1995), 124.

36. Jens Andermann and William Rowe, eds., *Images of Power. Iconography, Culture and the State in Latin America* (New York: Berghan, 2005), 3.

37. Maja Mikula, “Vernacular Museum Communal Bonding and Ritual Memory Transfer among Displaced Communities,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 21, no. 8 (March 23, 2015): 1.

38. *Ibid.*, 2.

39. *Ibid.*, 11–12.

40. “En la actualidad se consideran platos típicos de El Carmen a la carapulcra, sopa seca, humita, dulce colado, machacado de membrillo, chapana, entre otros. Un ejemplo de la fusión de distintas tradiciones es la carapulcra . . . de las palabras ‘cala’ que significa piedra caliente y ‘purka’ que es la puerta del horno de la pachamanca.” Translated from Altamarino and Chávez, “El Carmen,” 57.

41. “Es un plato adoptado a las necesidades de sobrevivencias del Afrodescendiente, es decir, utilizaron los residuos de papa, las menudencias y el ají. La comida de los esclavos se prepara fundamentalmente de las menudencias dejadas por las cocineras de los blancos. Ello quiere decir que los negros recogían los desperdicios para preparar sus alimentos. En cuanto a su tradición cultural Africana, se tiene el gran aporte de sus platos a la gastronomía peruana.” Translated from Florentino Arpa Calachua, “Oportunidades para la reflexión intercultural,” in *Historia del pueblo afroperuano y sus aportes a la cultura del Perú: Oportunidades para la reflexión intercultural con docentes, padres de familias y estudiantes*, Tomo 1 (Lima: Ministerio de Educación, 2013), 23.

42. Served with fried potatoes, *anticucho* is a delicacy made up of cow intestines and other internal parts. In the time of slavery, it was food for the enslaved that was rejected by their masters, who preferred more juicy parts of the cow. However, this has become an expensive delicacy that only the relatively well-to-do can afford as its price is higher than the average price for a standard meal in Peru.

43. Quoted in Janet Ward, *Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 233.

44. Ramírez-Castello, “Afro-Peruvian Identity,” 121.

45. *Ibid.*, 113.

46. *Ibid.*, 123.

47. Lobatón and Julca, “Los Afroperuanos,” 90.

48. Lucia Ballumbrosio in discussion with the author, El Carmen, Chincha, August 10, 2015.

Part Three

Migration against the Grain

Narratives of Return

Reading Space, Subjectivity, and Form in the Twenty-First-Century Narrative of Return

Madhu Krishnan

It has become commonplace in scholarship to place the experience of migration at the center of contemporary African literature, viewing the thematic content of the former as integral to the expressive aesthetics of the latter. Ranging from the claim that “African writers have become part of the worldwide phenomena of migration and globalization with the attendant physical, sociocultural, psychic, and other forms of dislocation, which permeate their individual writings,”¹ to the observation that approximately “half of all the writers hailing from African countries are said to have lived abroad,”² to the focus on “mobility [as] a key component” of this body of work,³ critical accounts of contemporary African writing place transnational fluidity at the heart of its epistemic foundations. While one might argue that an overdetermining emphasis on concepts such as migration and diaspora has hampered how contemporary criticism has engaged with literary production from and around the African continent, it is equally the case that a growing body of critical writing has emerged that registers how contemporary writing from Africa and its diasporas complicates teleological visions of migration in ways that far surpass the straightforward binaries of “here and there, homeland and hostland and indigenosity and foreignness on which it is assumed to be predicated.”⁴

Along with a shift in emphasis from the former imperial center of the United Kingdom to the current symbolic center of the United States, contemporary Anglophone migration narratives reflect, too, an asymmetric, cyclical dynamism that both mimics long-running patterns of circular migration within territories and disallows any reading of migration as a simple, teleological, or Manichean movement from periphery to center. Maintaining epistemological, ontological, and material ties across multiple locations spanning continental

“home” (or “homes”) and Euro-American “destination,” the polydirectional movements of contemporary migration that emerge in African literature defy any singular category or conscription. Instead, they foreground a “decentered and dynamic idea of Africa” in which the continent is “conceived as a site of passage and reproduced through circulation and mixing.”⁵ This is a literary aesthetic that registers the complexity of the agonistic and ongoing process of self-fashioning, set against the complex material circuits of a vision of diaspora that is multiaxial and multiple in its purview.⁶ In this chapter, I consider how two recent texts by expatriate African writers, Okey Ndibe’s *Foreign Gods, Inc.* and Noo Saro-Wiwa’s *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria*, operate as paradigmatic exemplars of these interventions through their manipulation of what can broadly be conceived of as the narrative of return.

The narrative of return has been a central discursive type in African literature since at least the first half of the twentieth century. In Anglophone and Francophone texts written around the independence era, for instance, the conflict engendered by temporary migration to the imperial metropole, usually undertaken under the auspices of colonial education, was commonly used to register the tension between competing visions of so-called modernity and tradition. Narratives such as Camara Laye’s *L’enfant noir*, Chinua Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease*, Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s *Aventure ambiguë*, Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North*, and countless others dramatize the clash of incongruous spatial ecologies as a means of foregrounding the anxieties of capitalist, colonialist modernity and its extrapolation of the patterns of uneven development to African territories.⁷ As Nicholas Brown suggests, novels by these authors must be read as central to the project of modernity, often thought of as a strictly European phenomenon, and the development of modernism.⁸ In this observation, Brown foregrounds the extent to which it is important to read these texts not as simplistic or binary-oriented tales of conflict in which homogeneous and diametrically opposed forces meet, but rather as textual artifacts that register the internal contradictions of modernity through a recentering of African experience and agency. Conceived and published in an era in which colonial educational practices functioned in large part through the inculcation, for a certain middle-class elite, of metropolitan norms, these texts archive the dis-ease through which the constitution of a comprador bourgeoisie and absorption of African colonial holdings into the global capitalist economy was felt, together asserting a vision in which migration “burdens the individual with psychological, spiritual and other problems” at the same time that return enables “eventual self-fulfillment.”⁹ Central to the dynamics apparent in these texts is Doreen Massey’s observation that space is constituted by the interrelations between seemingly disparate places, forging a mutually constituted “contemporaneous plurality” in which the ongoing and sometimes incongruous shifts of a global, transnational, and deterritorialized “globality” function in tandem with the seemingly bounded phenomenon of territorial change.¹⁰

In the contemporary context, novels such as Taiye Selasi’s *Ghana Must Go*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah*, and Teju Cole’s *Open City* amplify

the socioeconomic anxieties of their predecessors through an adherence to what has come to be known as Afropolitanism, sometimes conflated with post-nationalism. In its most positive sense, Afropolitanism urges a view of African identity as “rooted in specific geographies, but also as transcending them,”¹¹ producing a set of identifications in which “community is polychromatic, polymorphic, diverse, and open” and that enables the crossing of “the psychic boundaries erected by nativism, autochthony, heritage and other mythologies of authenticity.”¹² At the same time, in its less celebratory guise, this is a version of African identity “measured by the extent to which it can reproduce a Western lifestyle,”¹³ oriented toward the global North and marked by a certain “uncritical embrace of consumer cultures and an equally uncritical embrace of selective, successful global mobility and cultural literacy in the Global North.”¹⁴

Though less commented upon than the examples of Adichie, Selasi, and Cole, Ndibe’s and Saro-Wiwa’s additions to the growing canon of contemporary narratives of return thus hold an important place through their respective contributions to and contraventions of this body of writing, both adhering to Mbembe’s utopian notion of the Afropolitan aesthetic as a mode of self-explication and departing from the more market-driven image of the African subject as a mobile, free-floating consumer of culture. Though starkly different in both content and form, *Foreign Gods, Inc.* and *Looking for Transwonderland* share with each other a kind of skepticism toward the supposed dualities of migration and return, whether under the celebratory guise of Afropolitanism or the more cynical purview of Afropessimism. In both works, that is, mobility to and from the global North operates not simply as a means of self-realization or of free-flowing global movement; rather, the passage from South to North and back functions across multinodal spatial networks mediated by the workings of power, both economic and political, and fundamentally uneven in its realization. In *Foreign Gods Inc.*, for instance, Ndibe’s working poor hero’s return to his natal home bears few markers of opulence and alienation seen in the middle-class narratives so often celebrated as Afropolitan in their outlook, deploying an affective range oddly apart from the middle-class ennui of Adichie’s Ifemelu or Cole’s Julius. *Looking for Transwonderland*, more obviously, marks a departure in genre and form as a nonfiction travel memoir rather than the more familiar novel. Both works, moreover, enable what I am conceiving of as an ontological condition of dis-alienation, an extension of the African alienation celebrated by Abiola Irele as opening the self to new ethical understandings and later described by Ato Quayson as a means for “breaking out of [the] obverse and obsessive structure of determinations” that define blackness and Africanness in the global knowledge economy.¹⁵ By exploring the questions of form and genre that these works raise, a range of observations arise about the assumptions around both African literature, as a global market category, and the role of migration as the site of an ontological rupture in this body of work more specifically. Put more precisely, these two novels indicate the extent to which migration functions not through a binary opposition of places and spaces, but rather through an interpenetrating and multiaxial spatial network

that functions across dynamic and overlapping planes of affective and ontological experience, unsettling the totalizing narratives of “African experience” and reorienting staid truisms about “home” and “diaspora.”

Foreign Gods, Inc. tells the story of Ikechukwu Uzundu, “Ike for short,”¹⁶ an educated Nigerian now working as a taxi driver in New York City and living a life of alcohol, squalor, and poverty. Despite his degree in economics from Amherst College, Ike is unable to find the professional position he so desires in an America where a foreign accent is enough to override any qualification. Consigned to an existence lived as part of the detritus of the American Dream, Ike’s life is further torn apart by a brief, doomed marriage to an African American woman, Bernita, whose erratic spending and erotic penchants leave him destitute and broken. The primary action of the novel begins shortly after Ike, motivated by an article in *New York* magazine, makes the decision to return to his natal village of Utonki in southeastern Nigeria in order to steal the village deity, Ngene, to sell to an exclusive Manhattan art gallery dealing in foreign gods, “powerful, ancient deities”¹⁷ whose popularity was “a new diversion for the wealthiest of the wealthy whose after-dinner drone is peppered with talk of million-dollar losses in capital ventures, the purchase of multimillion-dollar yachts, or splashes of excess on the island of Saint-Tropez.”¹⁸ Framed by Ike’s last days in New York before his departure and his doomed return, the bulk of the narrative concerns itself with Ike’s time in Nigeria, following him from Lagos to Enugu to Utonki in a quasi-parodic take on the nostalgia of return.

By contrast, Saro-Wiwa’s *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria* takes the form of a travelogue-cum-memoir. Written by the daughter of the murdered writer and Ogoni activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, *Looking for Transwonderland* recounts the at times difficult, at times surreal, and at times hilarious experiences Saro-Wiwa encounters on a several-months-long trip back to the land of her birth. Describing a quotidian middle-class British childhood in “leafy Surrey, a bountiful paradise of Twix bars and TV cartoons and leylandii trees, far removed from the heat and chaos of Nigeria,”¹⁹ punctuated by miserable summers back in her home village in the Niger Delta, at the mercy of her father’s certainty that “the luxuries of English life were not what [he] had brought his children to England for,”²⁰ Saro-Wiwa’s narrative is interwoven with memories from the past and the ghosts of her childhood. As her prologue explains, following her father’s murder at the hands of the Abacha regime, these annual visits to Nigeria stopped, leaving her no longer “obliged by [her] mother to go there any more” and no longer with any desire to do so.²¹ Despite the narrative’s characterization as a straightforward travelogue, neither its contents nor its form can be said to be so simply defined, mediated as they are by Saro-Wiwa’s personal grief over her father’s murder and agonistic attempts to reconcile with a new Nigeria. While the notion of a travel memoir may immediately hearken to an epistemophilic principle in reading, one in which the desire for knowledge is satisfied through textual explication, little in *Looking for Transwonderland* functions in this manner. From the spatial divisions that characterize each chapter, to the fluidity of the narrative voice, slipping between present

experience and past memory, the porous boundaries between space and time lend themselves to the creation of a narrative base that is oddly partial, utterly subjective, and mediated through a range of aesthetic and affective means that render its epistemophilic properties partial at best.

There has been a historical—though happily disappearing—tendency in studies of African literature to treat imaginative fiction as sociological data. Critiques of this perspective, ranging from Graham Huggan's castigation of the "anthropological exotic" in African literary writing,²² to Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s notion of the "anthropological fallacy" with which black cultural forms are routinely met,²³ to recurrent complaints over the political imperative routinely ascribed to African and African diaspora writing,²⁴ make plain the ethical, social, and intellectual paucity of this brand of treatment, citing its tendency to favor spurious links between author and character, or worse, literary technique and historical fact. It is not my intention, by placing together a work of non-fiction with a fictional text, to lend credence to this brand of analysis. Rather, my argument is that both Saro-Wiwa's and Ndibe's texts, despite their formal and generic differences, provoke a range of questions around migration and return, as ontological categories, and the affective dimensions of spatio-temporal displacement.

The notion of return has been the subject of considerable critical attention. Social science studies, for instance, have increasingly noted the growing prevalence of return migration as an important category of transnational mobility since the 1980s,²⁵ seeking to understand its economic and sociological motivations and effects. Explicated through a series of frameworks that have evolved in complexity and multipolarity over time, the scholarship on return migration has nonetheless suffered from its conflation of varying types of migratory activity and a generally reductive perspective on its sociocultural purview. In response to these issues, more recent scholarship has focused upon the ontology of migration and return and its complication of notions of authenticity, memory, and origin²⁶ on the one hand, and return as a plural phenomenon encompassing imagined, provisional, and forced patterns of movement across varying geographical and temporal scales on the other.²⁷ As literary narratives, imbued with the interiority and breadth of perspective of imaginative writing, Ndibe's and Saro-Wiwa's texts offer important interventions into extant discourse around migration and return through their ability to foreground the affective dimensions at play. In both *Foreign Gods, Inc.* and *Looking for Transwonderland*, the protagonist's return is motivated by largely pragmatic—if effectively emotional—motives. Ike, in the former, returns to Utonki in part to assuage his guilt about his ailing mother's health and sister's chronic worry, but mostly to execute the theft that frames the novel and that he supposes will save him from a life of poverty. Saro-Wiwa, too, returns to Nigeria with an instrumental purpose, in this case to conduct the research leading to the very book recounting her travels, obligated by a publisher's advance. For both the fictional Ike and the narrative Saro-Wiwa, moreover, the question of return is only ever couched in temporary or provisional terms, intended to last over a

fixed and predetermined amount of time in order to carry about a specific task before returning to the United States and Britain, respectively. While neither journey would, in orthodox social scientific literature, fall easily into the category of return, both exemplify the increasing complexity of territorial mobility in the early twenty-first century. Indeed, following Brah's observation that "new transnational configurations of power articulate with fundamental transformations in the political economy of late twentieth-century capitalism,"²⁸ both of these unorthodox journeys gesture toward the ways in which labor, capital, and materiality intersect with affect, memory, and desire in driving the processes of multi-axial mobility.

These shared foundations thus develop in the two texts a common, if not entirely congruent, ontological framework for the twinned notions of migration and return structured around the specific modes of defamiliarization and displacement that function at the heart of both texts. This, in turn, leverages aesthetic forms that make plain "the contradictions of and between location and dislocation."²⁹ In contrast to readings of migration and return that view these terms in a binary opposition, both texts develop an understanding of contemporary mobility, which is neither celebratory nor funereal in its aims, motivated neither by easy notions of "greener pastures" and "roots and cultural identities,"³⁰ nor entirely by traumatic loss. Rather, both texts betray a fundamentally complex notion of the migrated and migrating self not as severed from collective identities and traditions nor as deluded in the quest to recapture an imagined homeland, but as both rooted in past belongings and entirely beyond them.

In both works, that is, memory exists in tandem with the present, melding together differential temporalities and spatialities through lived experience. Simultaneously grounded in the sense of belonging engendered by a return "home," each text nonetheless maintains a certain displacement from static notions of place, space, and identity, manifesting through each protagonist's dis-alienation. Grounded in the fluidity of space-time as an ever-shifting nexus and the affective dimension of social subjectivity therein, both texts develop an ontological pluralization, manifesting as an enforced removal of the self from its collective embedding without severing its foundations within. Foregrounded in Ike's bewildered response of "I'm a Nigerian [. . .] Do I need a special reason to come to my country?"³¹ when interrogated about the purpose of his visit on arrival in Lagos, this condition moves beyond a clichéd sense of being a stranger to oneself. Rather, this is a state in which defamiliarization resides with the irrevocable imprint of recognition, and displacement functions as a both/and rather than either/or. Unable to discern whether "Nigeria [had] changed so much since he was last here or [he had] grown in innocence in the years he's lived in America,"³² this collapsing of the supposed teleologies of time and absolutes of space returns itself in a shapeless anxiety.

Describing what she calls "the most alienating of homecomings" on arrival to "a country [she] had never lived in, and a city [she'd] only visited briefly twice before, among a thoroughly foreign-sounding language,"³³ Saro-Wiwa's

travelogue opens by foregrounding the fallacy of return as a moment of awakening, the anticipatory nostalgia so often associated with it displaced by the more pragmatic realities of contemporary mobility. In her prologue, Saro-Wiwa describes the ambivalence marking her journey to Nigeria, explaining that “re-engaging with Nigeria meant disassociating it from the painful memories lurking in [her] mind’s dark matter.”³⁴ Half homeland and half haunting, Nigeria, for Saro-Wiwa, is a place inextricably intertwined with the very foundations of her being, exemplifying the notion that “identities/entities, the relations ‘between’ them, and the spatiality which is part of them, are all co-constitutive.”³⁵ Describing her yearning “to travel freely around the country, as part-returnee and part-tourist with the innocence of the outsider, untarnished by personal associations,”³⁶ Saro-Wiwa, in her apprehension, foregrounds the affective dynamics at the heart of spatio-temporal mobility, underscoring the anxiety, vulnerability, anger, and desire that emerge through its movements. In so doing, the narrative gestures toward a critical intervention into the notion of belonging as a binary term, transforming the twinned processes of inclusion and exclusion that predicate its appearance from oppositional concepts into mutually constitutive elements of the ontological condition of return.³⁷

In this context, disengagement and defamiliarization become the necessary preconditions for rediscovering the country as home, a means of reorientation by unmooring Nigeria from the murkiness of memory and revisualizing it through adult eyes. Under such conditions, return becomes a site of alienation, but an enabling alienation in which a deliberate distancing of the self marks the precondition for a reabsorption of the physical space into its symbolic and social measures. At the same time, this dis-alienation is of a type distinct from the alienation of the *évolué* found in narratives of yore, coming not from the shock of change, but rather as an affective response to the simultaneously occurring moment of recognition held alongside its rejection. Told not through the familiar mode of the novel, but through a hybridized travel narrative-cum-memoir, moreover, the experience of migration and return elucidated in *Looking for Transwonderland* offers a departure from orthodox readings based on singular concepts of nostalgia, memory, and desire. Instead, affect, geography, and positionality are forced into dialogue by the constantly shifting nexus within which each operates and that enables the coproduction and colocation of agonistic terms of being and becoming.

This movement crystallizes in a passage that describes Saro-Wiwa’s return to Ogoniland, her father’s home, to the childhood house of her long Nigerian summers. Though now owned by her elder brother, heir to the family business, the house retains its stamp of the past: “The living-room walls displayed photographs of us as children. Most of them were taken in England, our large-toothed faces foregrounding the lawns of Surrey and Derbyshire prep schools. The sight of it yanked me back in time and space, and confusingly oriented my mind away from this house and this country. Upstairs, my father’s tiny study was the one room that felt inhabited.”³⁸ With her brother out of town on business, Saro-Wiwa remains alone in the home, save for the family driver Sonny, for the

duration of her stay. As she explains, this is her first time in that house without anyone else. It is striking, in this context, that the push into nostalgia—what the narrative describes as a yanking through time and space—should be motivated not by the hazy memories of the childhood summers Saro-Wiwa once spent there, but rather by the imprint of England upon this space, literally fastened to its wall. Falling back “away from this house and this country,” returning to an English pastoral, Saro-Wiwa’s plunge into memory underscores the doubled and polydirectional work of displacement and defamiliarization characteristic of return, a sense of difference that nonetheless retains its rooting in the fundamentally familiar, the same. Home itself, as a concept, loses its singularity, its symbolic puissance revealing its own multipolar and multifocal orientation, simultaneously an invocation of an originary rootedness and expression of everyday, lived experience.³⁹

The home that Saro-Wiwa describes takes on the emotive valences of something suspended between tomb and memorial, the ghosts of her father’s life, the most elemental life force to be found. Later in this scene, a similar effect is described as Saro-Wiwa recollects the violence that befell Port Harcourt in 2007, a time in which, with each attack, “the street’s small business and art shops became the backdrop to gang warfare.”⁴⁰ Describing her horror on hearing the sounds of terror over a crackling phone line back in London, Saro-Wiwa’s affective response captures the spatio-temporal dynamics of migration and return through its doubling of space and time, a doubling that merges the two meanings of home and allows the English countryside to live on in Ogoniland, while, in the same gesture, the sound of bullets and shattered glass over a phone line in London can render the listener “less an émigré and more an exile in mourning for [her] home town,”⁴¹ made subject to an emotive and ethical transformation.

It is useful here to pause for a moment to compare Saro-Wiwa’s narrative of return with another nonfictional account taken from Binyavanga Wainaina’s *One Day I Will Write About This Place*. In a chapter originally published as a stand-alone short story, Wainaina recalls the Christmas of 1995, detailing a long-anticipated family reunion with his mother’s side and his first trip to her native land of Uganda. At first, the narrative proceeds with the familiar rhetoric of nostalgia and desire so often associated with tales of expatriation, describing Uganda as “a land of mystery,” a present absence in Wainaina’s life “with her myths and legends and horrors, narrated with the intensity that only exiles can muster.”⁴² Once his “childhood bogeyman,”⁴³ the land of Amin and expulsions, the Uganda that Wainaina meets defies all expectations, refusing to “conform to any African topography” previously known or imagined.⁴⁴ Yet this image of the homeland is soon burst open, exploding from its very foundations. Uganda is no longer Uganda; within it, it encapsulates territories and nations, spanning Rwanda, the Congo, and lands still distant, carrying within it ancient kingdoms that defy contemporary geographical constraints even as visas, borders, and controls do their work of severing its form. Through his family and the affective dimensions of their collective history, Wainaina describes

a return that presupposes plurality, simultaneity, and a form of métissage more elemental than hybridity, encapsulated in a feeling of kinship described as a sort of magic sung in “French, Swahili, English, Gikuyu, Kinyarwanda, Kiganda and Ndebele” written in “a multitude of passports.”⁴⁵ In Wainaina’s account, the acts of migration, movement, transit, and eventual return are mediated through an intergenerational communion in which memory and lived experience each create the basis upon which the other might unfurl. Exposing the inherent plurality of belongings and boundaries, this is a vision in which affect, materiality, and ontology combine. It is of no little coincidence that the scene Wainaina describes occurs shortly after a mental breakdown experienced at a university in South Africa, paradoxically enabling the alienating rupture of return to show its true face and dismantling its supposed dualities.

Given the constant oscillation in *Looking for Transwonderland* between the positions of insider and outsider, a constant shuttling between “we” and “they,” it may be tempting to read the travelogue in contrast with Wainaina’s as a search for a singular and unified imagined community in Benedict Anderson’s terms.⁴⁶ Indeed, this is precisely how the act of migration and return are often described.⁴⁷ Yet the forms of national identity espoused in *Looking for Transwonderland* are far more complicated than those promoted by Anderson, and bear much more in common with the multidimensional affective experience of return explicated in *One Day I Will Write About This Place*. Like Wainaina, for Saro-Wiwa too the process of return is mediated by the complex emotional and filiative ties of family legacy. Still more forcefully, *Looking for Transwonderland*, like *One Day I Will Write About This Place*, suggests a matrix through which to read national identity that departs from the strictly cultural and foregrounds the arbitrary construction of borders and boundaries. For Saro-Wiwa, this emerges through a sense that the Nigerian nation, contra Anderson, has been forged less through the circulation of cultural material than under the barrel of the gun that was colonialism. Throughout her travels, Saro-Wiwa comes time and again to this point—that “Nigeria’s 300-odd ethnic groups were prodded by the British into an arranged marriage to form a ‘unified’ nation state.”⁴⁸

Emphasizing the artificiality of the Nigerian nation, as a singular entity, this is a vision of a radically frustrated social life constantly under threat. Certainly there is a plurality in *Looking for Transwonderland* that gestures toward an opening not unlike that found in Wainaina’s. Yet this is an opening accompanied by a vague sense of nostalgic regret, registered in a turn toward the past as a site of redemption and reunification. In the hilltop kingdom of Sukur, for instance, much of the narrative is spent lamenting the passage of time:

Although it was time for me to return south again, a part of me wanted to stay here too. From Sukur’s splendid elevation, I stared at the distant horizon towards the rest of Nigeria, and for a second I yearned for this country to throw itself back to an Iron Age of sorts. I fancied being in a place where the gap between expectation and reality didn’t leave such a frustrating chasm; where I was at the mercy of nature’s caprices, not

corruption's iron fist; and I was ruled by a leader who, blessed with the miracle of humble introspection, actually listened to my gripes.⁴⁹

In a seemingly unironic inversion of the teleological vision in which space is turned into time as geographies that exist “*beyond* Europe henceforth [exist] *before* Europe,”⁵⁰ this passage leverages a pastoral naturalism that has long stood as the flip side of colonialist discourse characterizing Africa as a space of savagery, constructing the continent as a timeless idyll beyond the corrupting influences of modernity, an imagined prelapsarian space of innocence and purity. Yet rather than envision this space as untouched, autochthonous, and pure in its primordial affiliations, this is a vision of connectivity and a locally rooted cosmopolitanism, a brief “second” of yearning that is simultaneously acknowledged as impossible in its basic desires, which unsettles its very founding myths. In the same gesture, Saro-Wiwa captures the heart of the experience of migration and return, which the travelogue grapples with: a wish for the past to be undone, to return to an Edenic—and impossible—age of innocence in which the constant and continual movement between image and material, the very fabric of dis-alienation, may finally be undone. In the same manner in which return is never actually return in the simplistic sense because no place stays the same, this plea for an impossible purity transforms the condition of return into a site of ontological rupture that radically reframes the constructed narratives of the self, space, and the world. As Saro-Wiwa’s arrival in Nigeria aptly demonstrates, the condition of migration and return is no mere experience of phenomenology, nor is it an epistemic breakdown. Rather, it functions through an ontological struggle in which the normativity undergirding givens of location and conditions of duality are fundamentally destabilized through the returnee’s simultaneous, if neither coeval, covalent, nor congruent, position.

Few motifs in the travelogue express Saro-Wiwa’s relationship with Nigeria like her fascination with Nollywood. A form of entertainment still amateurish in its execution and largely nonexistent in her childhood,⁵¹ Nollywood encapsulates this ontological displacement-cum-rupture. Explicitly “Nigerian” in its sensibilities, lacking the “colonial sponsorship or tutelage” of the cinema of its Francophone neighbors,⁵² and defined by its speed of production and dissemination, Nollywood expresses a rebellion against the normative order in which aesthetic and artistic standards are evaluated according to hierarchies of value emanating from the supposed centers of world culture. Boldly flouting expectations, Nigeria, metonymically captured by Nollywood, presents not an alternative modernity or alternative ontology of modernity but rather an alternative to its singular image, a shattering of expectations that does not sit easily:

On the other hand, surely there are cinematic rules that shouldn’t *ever* be flouted? Aren’t scene length and camera angles dictated by innate, universal human responses and aesthetic values? Maybe Nigerian viewers differ from the rest of the world. Perhaps all those electricity blackouts and traffic go-slows have stretched Nigerians’ attention spans and raised our

tolerance threshold to the point that we're comfortable with poor sound and picture quality, comfortable with interminable long film scenes, and *positively* in favor of supernatural conclusions or any finale involving the comeuppance of women.⁵³

Despite her admiration for Nollywood, with its disregard for convention, Saro-Wiwa finds the total abandonment of the inculcated values of taste and distinction mediated by Europe and North America difficult—if not impossible—to reject entirely. Indeed, this passage is notable both for the way in which it attempts to explicate some sort of logic to the ascription of value and taste, an explication linked directly to Nigeria's own marginal position in the uneven geographies of global capitalism, while also oscillating between a sense of inclusion and separation—the distinction between “Nigerians” and “we.” Indicative of a spatial configuration exceeding the dualities implicit in globalization through its multiaxial play on the dialectic of territorialization and deterritorialization,⁵⁴ Nollywood has simultaneously been invoked as a paradigmatic exemplar of developmentalist modernity.⁵⁵ As an aesthetic form, Nollywood functions through “the formulation of unique, vernacular grammars of representation” that exceeds distinctions between the local and the global.⁵⁶ Initially, Saro-Wiwa's relationship to this form is one of the sneering outsider, finding “the poor production standards of these movies even more entertaining than the plots themselves.”⁵⁷ Yet, Nollywood remains a source of pride, an indigenous industry unashamed of its independence. Later in the narrative, Saro-Wiwa's ambivalence toward Nollywood all but disappears, its films becoming a recurrent motif in her long nights alone on the road, a source of comfort in unfamiliar surroundings. In a scene that, not coincidentally, appears after a rumination on the relative worth of “tradition” and “modernity,” Saro-Wiwa describes returning to her motel to watch another engrossing film:

But two hours later, I woke up to see the credits rolling. I had nodded off during the film, and I had no idea whether that nasty woman kept her job or not. This happened almost every time I watched these interminable Nollywood films. Yet I sought out these movies most evenings, and as time went on, I found myself caring more and more about the outcomes of the plots. I even surprised myself by recognizing the names of the more famous actors, my eyes lighting up at Clem Ohameze's name in the opening credits. What was happening to me?⁵⁸

Poor production standards aside, Nollywood stands for anything but boredom or backwardness. Instead, Nollywood is captivating, able to lull its viewer into a trance, fascinating and predictable all at once. With its easy flexibility, Nollywood becomes a point of entry into the country itself, operating outside the dualities of home and away and teleologies of migration, giving some semblance of form to the unspoken and incongruous lines of affiliation that mediate the alienated processes of belonging.

By contrast, Ike's return to his hometown organizes itself around a series of encounters that evoke a deeply rooted sense of the imagined homeland. Met by pure happenstance at Enugu airport by an old school friend, Ike is spirited off to Utonki in the VIP comfort of the other man's private car. Ensnared in the kind of quiet privilege that allows the caprices of nostalgia to blossom, Ike falls into a deep reverie, transforming upon arrival to the bridge that marks entry into the village into what the novel describes as "a sense of entrancement"⁵⁹:

Utonki! This was the village that had steeped him in the magic of the earth's redness and rich scents. Ah, *Utonki of the red earth!* A surreal redness, as if long ago the soil had wept blood. It was here that his tongue had learned the art of discrimination, able to tell the sweet from the tart, delicacies from bitter recipes. It was in Utonki that his ear had first picked up the sundry sounds of the world, the songs of the wind, the pitchy chirp of birds, the very earth heaving under the sun's rage. It was here that, on moonlit nights, he had played hide-and-seek with other children or sat on raffia mats, again with other dreamy children, to listen to some elder tell tales about cunning Tortoise and sinister Chameleon and about the irreconcilable feud between Mosquito and Ear. It was here that he had made his first forays into the woods, his first plunges into the river, thrashing against the current until he learned, on his own, to swim. He's traversed the landscape as an adventurous youth, mastering the smells and secrets of flowers, the stinks and secretions of various insects. It was here that he had mastered the different techniques for climbing a guava or mango tree. It was here he had learned how to aim a sturdy stick at hanging ripe mangoes, *ube* or *udala*.⁶⁰

At first glance, the narrative appears to conform to the nostalgic tropes so often associated with return in a manner far more straightforward than Saro-Wiwa's. Ike's musings highlight the timelessness of Utonki, that land of eternal red soil, its pastoral idyll, a space where children frolic under the indulgent smiles of their elders, pausing only to revel in the magic of the latter's folkloric wisdom and charm.

Utonki, for Ike, is a space firmly rooted in the imagined past, a hazy and nostalgic space of childhood. Rife with language that evokes the earth, the land, and the primordial essence of the countryside, this description of the village produces a sense of a place outside time and space, a place untouched by the corrupting influences of modernity, ensconced in a captivating and nourishing tradition. Yet this vision of an unspoiled homeland cannot hold. Nearly as soon as his reminiscences begin, Ike's reverie is broken by the sight of "electric poles dot[ing] the landscape"; "gigantic three-story buildings"; houses "where he remembered farmlands"; "concrete houses [. . .] where mud houses used to be"; and "satellite dishes or television antennas."⁶¹ Despite perceiving these signs of change and the inevitable shifting of space through time, Ike fails to fully register their larger import, lost, as he is, in the fictional creations of his

nostalgia-plagued mind. Caught in a trance, as the narrative describes it, the incongruity Ike observes between his memories, the imagined Utonki before his eyes, and the actual physical space through which he passes registers a sense of removal haunted by an oscillating sense of spatial-temporal return. Its ontological plurality, with its rupturing of normativity, is made apparent here as the real present and the imagined past interweave through the operations of Ike's perceptual faculties, the former flickering at the edges of the latter, itself a form of haunting that becomes a central motif throughout the remainder of Ike's stay.

In many ways, Ike's trajectory seems to follow conventional patterns, moving through a reverse teleological journey from the urbanized modernity of New York City to the frenetic chaos of Lagos to the relative calm of Enugu and finally to the sleepy village of his youth. Yet beneath the surface of Ike's own angst at the state of things are signs of a different Utonki, a Utonki that resists this drive into nostalgia. In this Utonki, change is everywhere, whether in the new bridge traversing the river that marks the village's boundary, built since Ike's last visit by a lovestruck politician for his local lover, or the freestanding mirror in Ike's mother's hall, "now a blemished relic, broken nearly mid-spine, held precariously in place with a thick, ugly pad of tape."⁶² The signs of a developing built environment and deteriorating personal possessions would be easy to dismiss as mere material effects; yet these superficial markers are joined by a series of far more potent shifts that signal Utonki's increasing absorption into the uneven geographies of late capitalist modernity and, indeed, its *a priori* location within. From the aforementioned satellite dishes adorning new construction in the village, to the luxury automobiles waiting outside Ngene's shrine and mobile phones freely used within, to the seemingly all-encompassing materialism of Utonki's political and spiritual leaders, to the twinned forces of capitalist consumption and religious fundamentalism, Utonki reveals itself as something else entirely, just beyond Ike's grasp.

This condition of plurality, and its power to destabilize the easy mythologies of return are made apparent to Ike when, visiting the home of a former school-mate turned big man, he catches a peculiar sight:

Five young boys, two girls and four adults sat in a semicircle on the carpeted floor, most of them absorbed by the game. One of the boys wore a T-shirt with TOMMY HILFIGER scrawled on it in large letters. Another sported an oversize T-shirt with the letters FUBU running down the length of its back. One of the girls faced the TV but directed her attention to a dust-brown teddy bear splotched with palm oil. The other girl was equally occupied with ministrations to a sheared twiggy Barbie.

Enrapt in the game, the watchers barely paid attention to Ike. They hooted at a dunk and then hissed at a missed layup. They signed and cursed when the referee made a call they disliked. When a player executed a crossover dribble, they hailed the maneuver. When another player fumbled, they chided.⁶³

The game, Ike quickly learns, is one which all of the viewers have seen before, the 1991 NBA championship game, faithfully captured on VHS. Befuddled as to what could be so captivating about a game older than many of its spectators, Ike soon discovers the aspirational nature of their viewing. As two young men clad in knock-off Fubu and Tommy Hilfiger apparel explain, if these tall, black American men could get paid millions just to throw a ball around, then clearly such a destiny could be in store for anyone. When Ike asked what they might do with their riches, his young interlocutors list a pathetic litany of material prosperity: cars to purchase, pizzas to eat, beers to drink, designer clothes in dated brands to wear, a crystallization of hegemonic, late capitalist modernity, realized through the young men's alienated nostalgia for an American opulence long since rendered obsolete.

Implying a deeper slippage into the neoliberal global economy, with its aspirational dreams of wanting to "be like Mike," and individualist, consumerist ethos, what Harvey has termed "the neoliberal ethic of intense possessive individualism [that] become[s] the template for human personality socialization,"⁶⁴ this encounter demonstrates the extent to which migration and mobility function from multiple perspectives and in multiple directions through the traversal not just of people and ideas but the very discursive superstructures that mediate the uneven, global geographies of the twenty-first century, foregrounding a form of deterritorialization that exceeds the singularity of constructs based on a totalizing vision of globalization. Firm in their belief in American prosperity, desirous of its material accoutrements, the young people whom Ike meets exist as much under the sway of nostalgia as he does, if inverted in its orientation toward an imagined America rather than imagined home. Both, in this mirroring, are held up as places that do not exist, static and imagined lands whose only value resides in myth and whose puissance cannot withstand any ontological battering.⁶⁵

Given his already precarious position at the start of the novel, it is perhaps no surprise that Ike's journey ends in disaster. Having stolen Ngene, Ike returns to a New York where African gods are no longer in fashion. Latin American gods are now "what collectors are looking for."⁶⁶ Dreams of riches dashed, Ike slides into an alcoholic despair, haunted by Ngene and the fate he tried to reject. By contrast, Saro-Wiwa's narrative ends on a moment of utopian hope, invoking forgiveness toward the country, which marks the start of "a new relationship," maintained from afar and functioning through the lived simultaneity of locations once thought of as discrete.⁶⁷ In both cases, the experience of transnational mobility is a process that is defined in equal parts by its affective nature and its materiality, lived through the built environment, cultural forms, and the unsettling experience of simultaneous modes of subjective belonging that transgress the teleological vision of space and time through an act of ontological rupturing. Both texts complicate the normativity of migration, diaspora, and return through narrativization, the textual properties of each uncovering multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings and movements. At the same time, both *Foreign Gods, Inc.* and *Looking for Transwonderland* suggest the paucity

of any single, grand narrative as a totalizing myth rendered impossible under the uneven geographies of the twenty-first century.

Notes

1. Tanure Ojaide, "Migration, Globalization, and Recent African Literature," *World Literature Today* 82, no. 2 (2008): 43.

2. Susan Arndt, "Euro-African Trans-Spaces?—Migration, Transcultural Narration and Literary Studies," in *Transcultural Modernities: Narrating Africa in Europe*, ed. Elisabeth Bekers, Sissy Helff, and Daniela Merolla (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 110.

3. Dustin Crowley, *Africa's Narrative Geographies: Charting the Intersection between Geocriticism and Postcolonial Studies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 136.

4. Russell King and Anastasia Christou, "Diaspora, Migration and Transnationalism: Insights from the Study of Second-Generation 'Returnees,'" in *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods*, ed. Rainer Bauböck and Thomas Faist (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 181.

5. Ryan Thomas Skinner, "An Afropolitan Muse," *Research in African Literatures* 46, no. 2 (2015): 23.

6. Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996), 183.

7. Other examples of this body of work include Ousmane Socé Diop's *Mirages de Paris* (1937), Bernard Dadié's *Un nègre à Paris* (1959), Ferdinand Oyono's *Chemin d'Europe* (1960), and Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* (1965).

8. Nicholas Brown, *Utopian Generations: The Political Horizon of Twentieth-Century Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

9. Ojaide, "Migration, Globalization," 46.

10. Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: SAGE, 2005), 9.

11. Chielozona Eze, "Rethinking African Culture and Identity: The Afropolitan Model," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 26, no. 2 (2014): 240.

12. *Ibid.*, 245; Chielozona Eze, "We, Afropolitans," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 28, no. 1 (2016): 117.

13. Emma Dabiri, "Why I Am (Still) Not an Afropolitan," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 28, no. 1 (2016): 106.

14. Grace A. Musila, "Part-Time Africans, Europolitans and 'Africa Lite,'" *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 28, no. 1 (2016): 112.

15. Ato Quayson, "Self-Writing and Existential Alienation in African Literature: Achebe's *Arrow of God*," *Research in African Literatures* 42, no. 2 (2011): 43.

16. Okey Ndiibe, *Foreign Gods, Inc.* (New York: Soho Press, 2014), 1.

17. *Ibid.*, 9.

18. *Ibid.*, 69.

19. Noo Saro-Wiwa, *Looking for Transwonderland: Travel in Nigeria* (London: Granta, 2012), 4.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., 7.

22. Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001), 34–57.

23. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “Criticism in the Jungle,” in *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Methuen, 1984), 5.

24. See, for instance, Ben Okri, “A Mental Tyranny Is Keeping Black Writers from Greatness,” *Guardian*, December 27, 2014; Aminatta Forna, “Don’t Judge a Book by Its Author,” *Guardian*, February 13, 2015.

25. Jean-Pierre Cassariono, “Theorising Return Migration: A Revisited Conceptual Approach to Return Migrants,” *EUI Working Papers*, RSCAS no. 2004/02, 1.

26. King and Cristou, “Diaspora, Migration,” 168–71.

27. Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, 179; Ellen Oxfeld and Lynellyn D. Long, “Introduction: An Ethnography of Return,” in *Coming Home? Refugees, Migrants and Those Who Stayed Behind*, ed. Lynellyn D. Long and Ellen Oxfeld (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 1–15.

28. Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, 180.

29. Ibid.

30. Enajite E. Ojaruega, “Outgoing and Incoming Africans: Migration and Reverse Migration in Contemporary African Narratives,” in *Tradition and Change in Contemporary West and East African Fiction*, ed. Ogaga Okuyade (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014), 33.

31. Ndibe, *Foreign Gods, Inc.*, 79.

32. Ibid.

33. Saro-Wiwa, *Looking for Transwonderland*, 13.

34. Ibid., 9.

35. Massey, *For Space*, 10.

36. Saro-Wiwa, *Looking for Transwonderland*, 9.

37. Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, 192.

38. Saro-Wiwa, *Looking for Transwonderland*, 272.

39. Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, 4.

40. Saro-Wiwa, *Looking for Transwonderland*, 279.

41. Ibid.

42. Binyavanga Wainaina, *One Day I Will Write About This Place* (London: Granta, 2011), 153.

43. Ibid., 156.

44. Ibid., 157.

45. Ibid., 163.

46. Drawing on the work of Renan, for Anderson, “nationality, or, as one might prefer to put it in view of that word’s multiple significations, nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind” that are “*imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” Benedict Anderson, *Imagined*

Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso, 1991), 4–5.

47. See, for instance, the discussion of James Clifford in Arndt, “Euro-African Trans-Spaces?,” 107.

48. Saro-Wiwa, *Looking for Transwonderland*, 122.

49. *Ibid.*, 205.

50. Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994), 27.

51. Saro-Wiwa, *Looking for Transwonderland*, 77.

52. *Ibid.*, 78.

53. *Ibid.*, 81.

54. Adetayo Alabi, “Introduction: Nollywood and the Global South,” *The Global South* 7, no. 1 (2012): 2; Matthew H. Brown, “At the Threshold of New Political Communities: Some Notes on the History of Nollywood’s Epic Genre,” *The Global South* 7, no. 1 (2013): 56.

55. Alessandro Jedlowski, “Nigerian Videos in the Global Arena: The Post-colonial Exotic Revisited,” *The Global South* 7, no. 1 (2013): 157–78; Ifeanyi Ezeonu, “Nollywood Consensus: Modeling a Development Pathway for Africa,” *The Global South* 7, no. 1 (2013): 179–99.

56. Jude Akudinobi, “Nollywood: Prisms and Paradigms,” *Cinema Journal* 54, no. 2 (2015): 134.

57. Saro-Wiwa, *Looking for Transwonderland*, 80.

58. *Ibid.*, 227.

59. Ndibe, *Foreign Gods, Inc.*, 85.

60. *Ibid.*, 87–88.

61. *Ibid.*, 88.

62. *Ibid.*, 93.

63. *Ibid.*, 236–37.

64. David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (London: Verso, 2013), 14.

65. Frederick Cooper, “What Is the Concept of Globalization Good for? An African Historian’s Perspective,” *African Affairs* 100, no. 399 (2001): 189–213.

66. Ndibe, *Foreign Gods, Inc.*, 322.

67. Saro-Wiwa, *Looking for Transwonderland*, 304–5.

Looking for Transwonderland

Noo Saro-Wiwa's Migration of the Heart

Toni Pressley-Sanon

In recent years several scholars and writers have explored the complexities of migration and return to one's homeland.¹ However, the knottiness of the diasporic person's return to his or her land of birth under the shadow of trauma that is both personal and political in nature remains largely unexplored. Noo Saro-Wiwa,² in her memoir/travel narrative *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria*, excavates this challenging terrain. This chapter discusses how, for some members of the African diaspora, the oft-quoted phrase "the personal is political"³ gets played out in very real ways when they return to their land of birth, even if for a short while, especially when the returnee has a history of trauma with regard to the native land.

When I use the term *African diaspora*, I do not do so in the way that it is largely understood as someone who is a descendant of African people who were forcibly shipped to the New World and subjected to the European institution of slavery from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century.⁴ Rather, I use it in the way Noo does—as a first-generation African who has migrated to another country. This widely neglected segment of the African diaspora holds its own set of complicated and tension-ridden relationships with the "homeland," a relationship that is further complicated by one's status as an ethnic minority.

Trauma, Loss, Absence

In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, the historian Dominick LaCapra posits that "a crucial issue with respect to traumatic historical events is whether attempts

to work through problems, including rituals of mourning, can viably come to terms with (without ever fully healing or overcoming) the divided legacies, open wounds, and unspeakable losses of a dire past.⁵⁵ He distinguishes the trauma of loss from absence and warns against mistaking one for the other. Nonetheless, he suggests that blurring the distinction between, or conflating them is, in fact, telling and useful to understanding trauma as it “may itself bear striking witness to the impact of trauma and the post-traumatic, which create a state of disorientation, agitation, or even confusion and may induce a gripping response whose power and force of attraction can be compelling.”⁵⁶ He concludes that “the very conflation attests to the way one remains possessed or haunted by the past, whose ghosts and shrouds resist distinctions (such as that between absence and loss).”⁵⁷

I would suggest that Noo’s travels around Nigeria, with its many twists, turns, and stopovers, as well as her memoir/narrative about the journey, is a kind of ritual of mourning not only for her father, whom she lost to state violence when she was a teenager living thousands of miles away in England and whose absence she feels deeply, but also the resultant severed relationship with Nigeria, which she hopes to repair. Although her relationship with her native land was strained before she lost her father, his death at the hands of the state represents a double trauma, one in which the loss of her father, the weight of his absence, and her longing for his presence in her life is inextricably linked to the loss of her relationship with Nigeria and her desire to reconnect. I propose that although Noo spent only four months in Nigeria, she underwent a “migration of the heart,” that is, an internal rending and opening of herself to Nigeria in all of its complexity—its beauty and allure as well as its jagga jagga—ness—that represents a step toward coming to terms with, if not fully healing, her traumatic history. I would also argue that the “heart migration,” the opening and moving of herself toward Nigeria rather than away from it as she has done for most of her life, is a critical first step in the process of potential physical migration to follow. Finally, I propose that even if she ultimately decides not to take up permanent residence in Nigeria, her sojourn to the land of her birth—the site of one of her biggest life traumas—is a worthy accomplishment in and of itself. As Hadrien Diez remarks about Noo’s travels and writing of *Transwonderland*, Noo was finally able to “come to terms with Nigeria, an impossible yet exhilarating country and reconsider her father’s gruesome murder in a new light.”⁵⁸

Noo’s fraught relationship with Nigeria stems in large part from the fact that her father Ken Saro-Wiwa, along with eight other activists, was murdered in 1995 by the Nigerian government under General Sani Abacha for speaking out on behalf of the Ogoni people, an ethnic minority whose land was being decimated for profit by Shell Oil. Again, her trauma is personal as well as political because she lost her father to state-sanctioned violence and was left with his international legacy as a hero and martyr, which continues to haunt and possess her.

The Personal and the Political

The phrase “the personal is political” has its origins in second-wave feminism, but has been useful for understanding the experiences of people of color in a largely American context. Kimberlé Crenshaw observes that the phrase recognizes “as social and systemic what was formerly perceived as isolated and individual [and] has also characterized the identity politics of African-Americans, other people of color, and gays and lesbians, among others.”⁹ A consideration of the interrelatedness of the personal and the political with regard to Noo’s relationship with the memory of her father both as a father and as an international hero would be equally instructive here.

Through a close reading of several moments in *Looking for Transwonderland*, I explore how the author works through her personal history as a Nigerian diasporic ethnic minority. Her return to Nigeria is bound up with her father’s life, his murder, and his legacy—that is to say, it is bound up with the consequences he faced for speaking out on behalf of his people from whose land the black gold—oil—is extracted, polluting the land and impoverishing many while building wealth for a tiny corrupt few. The moments that I discuss allow the reader to feel, almost viscerally, the longing that Noo has expressed in interviews: to escape the trap of (consciously or unconsciously) piggybacking off of her father’s name; to get beyond feeling as if she is carrying her father’s name; that she is not just her by herself. By the end of the narrative, it is clear that her relationship with Nigeria has changed. The place has become more personal, more her own. With that ownership she has a newly discovered self-possessed freedom to return to Nigeria.¹⁰

Looking for Transwonderland is the author’s working through her trauma and haunting as well as a coming to terms with her status as a member of the Nigerian diaspora whose last visit to her home nation in 2005 was to bury the bones of her father, a kind of collective ritual mourning with her siblings. As such, the narrative speaks to the fact that, as the editors of this volume suggest, migration is fundamental to the creation of the black diaspora and the shaping of black identity. *Looking for Transwonderland*, however, troubles the notion of migration in the way that it becomes clear that that initial return failed to provide the closure it was meant to produce, leaving Noo with the need to return on her own terms to explore the layers of her experience both outside of and within the country and then write about it. The memoir/travel narrative interrogates the complexities of diasporic migration through a skillful weaving of her mother and siblings’ migration to England at her father’s insistence, childhood vacations spent in her family’s village, her father’s murder by Abacha’s corrupt government, broad portrayals of contemporary Nigerian culture and politics, and concomitantly, the quotidian experience of the majority of Nigerians in a land that was historically colonized by the British and is now ruled by oil.

A Bit of Background

Shell discovered oil in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria in 1956. Following the discovery, Ogoniland, once considered the “breadbasket” of Rivers State and described in Edenic terms by Saro-Wiwa as “a blessed land,” where “the fertile alluvial soils of the plain provided a rich harvest of yam, cassava and vegetable” and where “pure streams and seas brimmed with fish and other sea food” underwent a profound transformation.¹¹ Oil quickly became vital to the Nigerian economy, providing 80 percent of the country’s export revenue from more than nine hundred million barrels of crude oil.¹² Unfortunately, for the people of Ogoni, their rich stores of oil meant disaster. By 1993, after much agitation by Saro-Wiwa and his fellow activists, Shell finally abandoned the oil reserves. However, they left behind an area that was crisscrossed with dilapidated pipelines and pump stations that seeped oil into the soil, destroying it. A once vibrant fishing and agricultural community had been turned into “a grubby black moonscape,”¹³ where poverty and disease ran rampant; this is still the case. For example, in one area, Bodo, “there are thick carpets of film on the rivers and the sand of the coast is dirty with oil,” making it impossible for fishermen to practice their trade. In 2011 the United Nations published a report putting the cost of cleaning up the area at \$1 billion over a period of thirty years, a feat that has yet to be undertaken.¹⁴

In the early hours of November 10, 1995, the Abacha government, at the behest of Shell Oil, had Saro-Wiwa and eight of his comrades “judicially murdered.”¹⁵ The men were killed because they called for “a cleaner and more humane environment” in which to live as well as “a measure of political autonomy for the Ogoni to direct their own affairs.”¹⁶ As Ken Henshaw remarks, such a request was considered a sacrilege because it would have meant reducing Shell’s profits and power.¹⁷ The activist’s murder was quickly denounced by the international community with Nelson Mandela calling it “A heinous act” and led to Nigeria’s suspension from the Commonwealth for three years.¹⁸ It prompted Abdul Raufu Mustapha to beg the question of whether ethnic minorities like the Ogoni have a right to a say in their economic and political destiny.¹⁹ By December 1995, hundreds of tributes appeared. In them, while his codefendants are mentioned, it is Saro-Wiwa’s story that is highlighted. For example, Adebayo Olukoshi immortalizes him by writing that, although Saro-Wiwa had been murdered, his fight for justice and a representative government in Nigeria would live on.²⁰ Raufu Mustapha proposed that we owe a debt to Saro-Wiwa to expose and end the Nigerian government’s mindless authoritarian rule,²¹ and at least one poem compared him to Jesus: “Like Ken Like Christ.”²² Again, while several articles mention Saro-Wiwa’s comrades with some of them actually naming them, his particular story²³ and plight are repeatedly elevated, raising him in the popular imagination to Christ-like status.

In fact, while outrage at Saro-Wiwa's unjust arrest and execution was being expressed around the world, Noo, who had lived in Surrey, England, with her three siblings and their mother since she was barely one year old, knew nothing.²⁴ As Noo relates, when she finally learned that her father had been killed, what shocked her almost as much as his murder was "how huge the news was. It was the front page of every newspaper, the top item on the TV news. I had no idea he was such a big figure. That he meant so much."²⁵ This Christ-like picture of Ken Saro-Wiwa who sits in the same space as the distant father who also sits in the same space as a corrupt murderous government that murdered him provided the fodder for the inextricably connected and fraught relationship that Noo developed with her homeland and which she explores in *Looking for Transwonderland*.

National vs. Ethnic Identities

While racial tensions are not prominent features of Noo's narrative, ethnic subjectivity and national identity shifts, both within and outside the shared space of Nigeria, color the text. The author expresses this reality in the first pages of the narrative when she recounts the experience of waiting at Gatwick Airport in Horley, England, to board a Virgin Airways flight to her country of birth, which she had not visited in more than ten years. When her fellow Nigerian passengers begin loudly protesting their perceived mistreatment by the airline, she feels compelled to claim her Nigerian identity. Rather than distance herself from what the non-Nigerian staff and passengers consider rowdiness, she draws "her people" closer, employing the collective pronoun to talk about their behavior:

But whoever decided to send in armed police to monitor the situation was taking an unnecessary precaution. I wanted to tell them not to panic. Nigerians like to shout at the top of *our* voices, whether we're telling a joke, praying in church or rocking a baby to sleep. I wanted to tell them that *we're* not crazy—decades of political corruption have made *us* deeply suspicious of authority—but there was no one to discuss this with, so I had no choice but to sit and watch *our* national image sink further in the eyes of the world.²⁶

Her use of the collective and possessive pronoun *our* here illustrates, as she has stated in interviews, that she identifies as Nigerian and considers her fundamental identity to be from Nigeria.²⁷

In the European airport, Noo's identification with the Nigerian people is set against the corruption of the Nigerian state apparatus of which they are all victims and which accounts for their distrust of established political order and against the international community that makes "being Nigerian the most

embarrassing of burdens.”²⁸ At the same time, she acknowledges the prickliness of her geographical identity when she states that, in airports where, as a Nigerian raised in England, she is “forced to watch the European and African mindsets collide in a way that equally splits [her] loyalty and disdain towards both.”²⁹ While she wants to “spank” one Italian passenger for misunderstanding their (again, she uses the collective *our*) behavior and reveling in his sense of superiority, she also cringes at the “noisy Nigerian passengers for their paranoia, ill discipline, and obliviousness to British cultural norms.”³⁰

The scene can be contrasted with her later comments at various points in the text on her relationship to Nigeria as a member of an ethnic minority. For example, while visiting the Benin empire, she remarks that the moat she visits had been used as protection against foreign invaders and writes about how she had been in the country long enough by then to take less proprietary pride in the place than she did when she was in London. In fact, visiting the area made her feel more Ogoni than ever with her ethnic minority status in Nigeria growing almost as strong as her racial identity in England. She asserts, “My people, the Ogonis, had been bit players in the drama of Nigerian history where the Binis, Yorubas, Hausas and Igbos played a leading role. Mocked as simpletons and cannibals, Ogonis were barely known outside the Delta region until my father made our presence felt.”³¹ While in the face of international scrutiny in England, her claiming Nigerian nationality is a way of establishing her loyalties; this later comment, as with most of the text, links her personal history to her father and the political history of the nation. Ken Saro-Wiwa is not only significant because he is her father, but also because he gave the ethnic minority Ogoni a voice where before they had none.

The author raises the issue of ethnic affiliation a final time when, as she nears the end of her travels, she visits her family’s village, Bori, and concludes, “Having spent four months travelling around as an ethnic foreigner, being in a place where Khana was widely spoken carried a new and deep significance. These were *my* people—not sharp-nosed Hausas, or Efiks, Biroms or Yoruba—but Ogonis.”³² Rather than rejecting her Nigerian identity here, we may see her as simply highlighting her ethnic identity, a primary consideration of many “African” cultures before their colonization by Europeans and which the writer and critic Chinua Achebe took pains to explore in his seminal novel *Things Fall Apart* as a response to European depictions that elided and ignored their distinct histories and cultures, differences that the international community continue to ignore and elide. At the same time, she draws the reader’s attention to her father’s particular plight; after all, it was the Ogoni people’s land that has been decimated by the exploitation of their oil reserves, not that of other ethnic groups, which have their own particular historical relationships with colonization. Nonetheless, it should be noted that while she is able to explore these internal differences (ethnic identities), she is still not “home” in Bori as her presence there also shines a spotlight on her outsider status as a product and member of the diaspora.

Migrations of the Heart: *Looking for Transwonderland as a Love Poem to the Father and the Nation*

At the end of his article, “When the Diaspora Returns Home: Ambivalent Encounters with the Ethnic Homeland,” the migration scholar Takeyuki Tsuda cautions that we must be careful to distinguish the concept of “homeland” from the concept of “home.” Although they are often conflated and used interchangeably based on the assumption that “home” is located in the homeland, the two places do not always correspond for migrants. *Homeland* is a place of origin to which one feels emotionally attached whereas *home* is a stable place where one feels secure, comfortable, and familiar. Whereas it is often the case that homeland is a place where individuals feel at home, home and homeland are not always the same place.³³ This distinction between homeland and home is critical for Noo with regard to her relationship with Nigeria and England. Although Nigeria is Noo’s place of physical origin (her “homeland”), because of the opportunities that she enjoys abroad (her “home”), it is in England that she finds security and comfort. Indeed, the concepts of “home,” “homeland,” and “return” seem to have been difficult bridges for Noo to cross when she set out on her travels around Nigeria. As Diez observes about her, geographical identity—the sense of belonging to a certain place—has always been an issue for Noo. Prior to her father’s death she discovered the “distant and growingly alienated country during the dreaded two-month summer breaks”³⁴ only when she was forced to return. Her relationship to Nigeria diverged greatly from that of her parents, who believed that “without their country they were nothing.”³⁵ Noo recounts in her “Prologue” that when she was young her mother acknowledged a difference between the Surrey residence, “the house” and “home.”

For Mrs. Saro-Wiwa,

Nigeria was ‘home,’ the place where her parents and siblings lived, where her wilted energies blossomed and her pale skin toasted to its original brown. At ‘home’ she sparkled in Nigerian traditional clothing, rather than battling the British winter air in woolens and thick overcoats. At ‘home’ she was no longer the alienated housewife, but the Madam, handing over laundry and shopping lists to the servant while she caught up with old friends.³⁶

Conversely, for Noo, home was “leafy Surrey, a bountiful paradise of Twix bars and TV cartoons and leylandii trees, far removed from the heat and chaos of Nigeria.”³⁷ After her father was killed, her estrangement from the country grew; she “wanted nothing to do with her birth country.”³⁸ Even after she became a travel writer touring Africa, she did not return to Nigeria for more than a decade, only making an exception for her father’s official funeral and then, years later, for his real funeral.³⁹

Noo's dis-ease with her homeland as inextricable from her memory of her father is evident in the first pages of her memoir. The drawing closer that one senses in Noo's language regarding her fellow countrymen and countrywomen in the British airport is contrasted with the distance she creates between herself and the iconographic figure, "Ken Saro-Wiwa," whom she does not mention by name until page eleven. Before that, she points the reader in the direction of her familial relationship with him, referring to him simply as "my father." This positioning of herself in relationship to Nigerians versus Saro-Wiwa with whom she has a personal connection not only privileges the collective over the individual, it also brings into relief her personal relationship to the icon who was also her father, stripped of his political affiliations and accomplishments. This reorientation is further accomplished in the "Prologue," where she weaves her relationship with her father with that of her mother, her full and half siblings, her grandmother, and the village in which she lives, as well as European passengers and airline staff. In fact, Noo does not mention "my father" until page four when she explains that, with plans to give his children English schooling, he "settled the family in the UK while he continued to work in Nigeria as a property developer, writer, and businessman."⁴⁰ If the reader was not already familiar with who Ken Saro-Wiwa was, she or he would have no idea of the significance of such information. Her following that information with the fact that his decision left her homesick mother to head the family, mothering children who watched *Sesame Street*, scribbled "naughtily on the walls," and scanned "the fridge for snacks"⁴¹ embeds Ken Saro-Wiwa into the family structure, taking him out of the narrative of the sacrificial lamb or Christ-like figure that he represents to the world.

Finally, the "Prologue" links the corruption of the Nigerian government with the icon Ken Saro-Wiwa as they appear together on page seven. Noo seamlessly links the personal with the political when she writes about learning her father had a second family in Nigeria, and meeting and spending time with her two half-sisters during one of her summer vacations in her village. She concludes that "by holiday's end, the two halves of the family had warmed to each other, but Nigerian family life now seemed as treacherous and unpredictable as the military dictatorship that destabilized Nigeria during those years."⁴² Following a brief delineation of the Ogoni struggle that I outline above, she announces, "in the early 1990s, my father, Ken Saro-Wiwa, had started a campaign against government corruption and environmental degradation by Shell."⁴³ The first line of the paragraph that follows reads, "My father's murder severed my personal links with Nigeria."⁴⁴ Before her father's murder, traveling to Nigeria had presented a childhood inconvenience, but afterwards Nigeria moved beyond simply not being "home." It became "an unpiloted juggernaut of pain" and a "repository" of all her "fears and disappointments; a place where nightmares did come true."⁴⁵ Again, here, we can return to LaCapra and his theory of the relationship between trauma, absence, and loss. We can see in this statement that Noo struggles with the trauma that results from not only the loss of her

father, but her loss of Nigeria, her homeland. Not only has her father's death presented a personal crisis, but a political one as well in that it represents the loss of her *motherland*, Nigeria, signifying a kind of orphanhood. She feels the absence of both her father and her motherland, although perhaps not equally. While she cannot hope to recuperate a relationship with her father, she strives to establish a relationship with Nigeria that overcomes, or at least reconciles, the trauma that it represents for her.

Noo's return to Nigeria after so much time and trauma represents her attempt to disassociate from "the painful memories lurking in [her] mind's dark matter."⁴⁶ Her expressed hope is that traveling "freely around the country, as part-returnee and part-tourist with the innocence of an outsider, untarnished by personal associations" will help her "learn to be less scared of it, perhaps even like it, and consider it a potential '*home*.'"⁴⁷ But the potential contradiction in her hope lies in the fact that, although she seeks to shed some of her personal associations, she nonetheless plans to revisit some of the places her father showed her when she was a child to view them through her adult eyes.⁴⁸ I would argue, though, that rather than a "contradiction," Noo's stated intention reflects the interrelatedness of the personal and the political as integral to the work of moving beyond her personal trauma and coming to terms with Nigeria in all of its sociopolitical complexity. While I do not consider her use of the term *home* to refer to Nigeria and her aspirations regarding her emotional and physical relationship to it a coping mechanism, I do, however, consider it evidence of her longing for a Nigeria that she can consider "home" in a way that differs from but draws on the memory that she has of her parents' relationship to Nigeria.

The Return of the Émigré, or the Diaspora's Dilemma

At several moments in the text, Noo refers to herself alternately as émigré and diaspora, sometimes in relation to Nigeria; other times in relation to England. Toward the end of the text, when her cousin Tom tells her she thinks like a British person, she remarks that such confrontation, prodding, and disparaging "rubbed raw against [her] diasporan sensibilities, which were more used to British-style individualism and all the ginger diplomacy that comes with it."⁴⁹ Or toward the very end of her sojourn she remarks, regarding her memories of her father insisting that she and her siblings spend their summer vacations in the land of their birth, "so all was forgiven; the unspeakable train rides, the itchy tropical nights in the village, the enforced essay-writing in hotel rooms. For years they had turned me off Nigeria, but all of it, I now realised, was a necessary induction, a way of 'breadcrumbing' the trail between my village and my life as an émigré."⁵⁰ Finally, commenting on gang violence in her hometown of Port Harcourt in the summer of 2003, she says, "Though I had no intention of living in Port Harcourt, those months of violence made me less of an émigré and more an exile in mourning for my home town."⁵¹ Such reflections on her

fraught relationship with her homeland remind the reader of her personal and equally political ambivalence about Nigeria, which persists until the memoir/travelogue's end. Moreover, this mourning that she feels for her hometown is folded into her larger trauma around Nigeria as it not only signifies her profound break with her homeland, but also her persistent (perhaps inexplicable) connection with it and which is facilitated by, at its core, her love for it.

Between Two Worlds

Noo decides to spend her final days in Nigeria with her cousin and his family, who live near the airport. The book's "Epilogue" is loaded with the author's ambivalence about her homeland. Her decision to end her time in Nigeria and the narrative with a show that she attends alone at the incomparable Fela Kuti's nightclub, The Shrine, to see his son Femi perform is a metaphor for her continued ambivalence about Nigeria even at the end of her physical journey. Rather than spend her last night with family, she chooses to be in the company of strangers in a place that is internationally renowned. Considered a site of hedonism, The Shrine was founded by a man who protested, in very public ways, the corruption of the Nigerian government, but whose personal life was also rife with danger and a different form of corruption. As Noo remarks, "Fela was also incorrigible and untamed, railing against government immorality while grabbing his dancers' buttocks on stage; he had a messy family life and distaste for upward mobility."⁵² At the same time, she notes that he embodied everything she loved about Nigeria: he was "intelligent, funny, passionate, exciting, raw, an 'Africa man original,' not a 'gentleman."⁵³ Fela, like the Nigeria that nurtured and betrayed him, was messy and scattered, unpredictable and uncontainable, but also brilliant and funny, exciting and raw, and ultimately worthy of love and admiration.

After spending the night at The Shrine with other revelers long after the show ends because "Lagos isn't safe in the early hours,"⁵⁴ she looks around and is confronted with the contradictions that Nigeria represents and that are, in many ways, the source of her still unresolved relationship with it. As she observes, "That's Nigeria for you: it can be stylish, sublime, beautiful, yet no matter how much it amazes or bedazzles you, it's always that little bit jagga jagga."⁵⁵ Her description, following as it does her characterization of Fela, also summarizes her relationship with the larger country as well as her hometown of Port Harcourt, her father's village of Bori, her family's village of Bane, and, finally, her father, who was also the writer, politician, businessman, and ultimately martyr Ken Saro-Wiwa. Her ending the memoir/travelogue with the expression "jagga jagga" hints at the beginning of a reconciliation of the internal conflict that kept the author away from Nigeria for so long and a potential desire to engage more deeply with this homeland.

Family is jagga jagga—that is, messy and scattered, unpredictable and uncontainable. We see this jagga jagginess, for example, in Saro-Wiwa revealing to

his wife and children in England that he has a second family in Nigeria, which I discussed earlier. Again, as Noo remarks about the encounter, “by holiday’s end, the two halves of the family had warmed to each other,” even if they had not completely forgiven what may have been viewed as a betrayal, making “Nigerian family life . . . seem . . . treacherous and unpredictable.”⁵⁶ Indeed, family members impose traumatic memories on each other. This does not mean that they stop loving each other or that they can disavow one another. A similar argument can be made for one’s relationship with her or his homeland, which is messy and full of contradictions and corruptions and, yes, riddled with traumas (think African Americans in the United States’ context, for example). That does not mean that they no longer call that place “home,” even when sometimes they are no longer able to dwell there physically. They can and, in fact, may feel compelled to nonetheless travel there in their hearts and minds.

Expanding Migration

I argue that although she grew up in England, Noo’s relationship with Nigeria was never severed, not only because of forced summer vacation trips, but also because of the way that Nigeria seeps into the family’s daily life in, for example, the half-siblings she learned she had as a teenager. Her relationship with her land of origin was even more complicated in her young adult life by the trauma of her father’s murder. As an acknowledgment of the persistence of this trauma, this chapter has not discussed migration as it is commonly conceived of—as a seemingly uncomplicated physical movement from one geographical space to another for an extended period of time, perhaps to work or obtain an education, to start a family, to resettle or relocate. Rather, following Noo’s lead, which points to the necessity of recruiting the heart for the journey, I have focused on how we might consider how the personal is intricately and inextricably connected to the political in one’s decision to migrate and perhaps, more importantly, understand that migrations of the body begin with those of the heart and mind.

Notes

1. For examples, see Jasna Čapo Žmegač, “Ethnically Privileged Migrants in Their New Homeland,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 18, no. 2 (June 2005): 119–215; Jasna Čapo Žmegač, Christian Voss, and Klaus Roth, eds., *Co-Ethnic Migrations Compared: Central and Eastern European Contexts* (München: Verlag Otto Sagner, 2010); and Takeyuki Tsuda, “When the Diaspora Returns Home: Ambivalent Encounters with the Ethnic Homeland,” in *Blackwell Companions in Cultural Studies: A Companion to Diaspora and Transnationalism*, ed. Ato Quayson and Girish Daswani (Somerset, UK: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2013). For

literary examples, see Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (New York: Anchor Books, 2013) and Teju Cole's *Every Day Is for the Thief* (New York: Random House, 2014).

2. Hereafter I refer to Noo Saro-Wiwa by her first name, Noo, so as to avoid confusion in the reader's mind about whom I am speaking. I refer to her father, Ken Saro-Wiwa, by their shared last name.

3. The term was coined by feminist Carol Hanisch in her article by the same name, "The Personal Is Political" (1970).

4. See, for example, Joseph E. Harris's *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1993), Robin Cohen's *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), and Isidore Okpewho, Carole Boyce Davies, and Ali A. Mazrui's *The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

5. Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 45.

6. *Ibid.*, 46.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Hadrien Diez, "Noo Saro-Wiwa, in Between Nigeria's Extremes," *Africultures*, March 5, 2013, <http://www.africultures.com/php/?nav=article&no=11340>.

9. Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Intersectionality and Identity Politics: Learning from Violence Against Women of Color," in *Reconstructing Political Theory: Feminist Perspectives*, ed. Mary Lyndon Shanley and Uma Narayan (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1997), 178.

10. Her freedom to make this decision can be contrasted with the lack of choice available to her brother Ken, who, as "the First Born," had been compelled by tradition to return and take over the family business years before. Noo Saro-Wiwa, *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria* (Berkeley: Soft Skull Press, 2012), 8.

11. Colin Wiscombe, "Ken Saro-Wiwa's Death and Legacy 20 Years On," <https://www.naij.com/633082-stand-history-ken-saro-wiwa-death-legacy-20-years.html>.

12. Adebayo Olukoshi, Abdul Raufu Mustapha, Wole Soyinka, and Felix Mnthali, "A Tribute to Ken Saro-Wiwa," *Review of African Political Economy* 22, no. 66 (1995): 473.

13. Adrian Kriesch, "Why Nigerian Activist Ken Saro-Wiwa Was Executed," <http://www.dw.com/en/why-nigerian-activist-ken-saro-wiwa-was-executed/a-18837442>.

14. *Ibid.*

15. For a discussion of the events leading up to the murder, see Wiscombe, "Ken Saro-Wiwa's Death and Legacy."

16. Ken Henshaw, "Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Power of Resistance," <http://www.redpepper.org.uk/ken-saro-wiwa-and-the-power-of-resistance/>.

17. *Ibid.*

18. Wiscombe, "Ken Saro-Wiwa's Death and Legacy."
19. Olukoshi et al., "A Tribute to Ken Saro-Wiwa," 473.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Henshaw, "Ken Saro-Wiwa."
23. There are even articles that quote at length a speech that he is believed to have given just before his execution.
24. Her mother "shielded" her and her siblings "from a lot of what went on in the time leading up to the execution." See Jon Henley, "Nigerian Activist Ken Saro-Wiwa's Daughter Remembers Her Father," *Guardian*, December 30, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2011/dec/31/noo-saro-wiwa-kens-daughter-nigeria>.
25. Ibid.
26. Saro-Wiwa, *Looking for Transwonderland*, 1–2; emphasis added.
27. Diez, "Noo Saro-Wiwa."
28. Saro-Wiwa, *Looking for Transwonderland*, 2.
29. Ibid., 3.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid., 256.
32. Ibid., 289.
33. Tsuda, "When the Diaspora Returns Home," 185.
34. Diez, "Noo Saro Wiwa."
35. Saro Wiwa, *Looking for Transwonderland*, 5.
36. Ibid., 5–6.
37. Ibid., 4.
38. Diez, "Noo Saro Wiwa."
39. Ibid.
40. Saro Wiwa, *Looking for Transwonderland*, 4.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid., 7.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid., 7–8.
46. Ibid., 9.
47. Ibid.; emphasis added.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid., 285.
50. Ibid., 304–5.
51. Ibid., 279.
52. Ibid., 309.
53. Ibid., 308–9.
54. Ibid., 308.
55. Ibid., 309.
56. Ibid., 7.

The Literary Circulation of Teju Cole's *Every Day Is for the Thief*

Connor Ryan

The cover image shows four or five figures, perhaps a family, astride a motorcycle that speeds underneath an overpass in Lagos and past the camera. The motion blurs their faces and bodies. In the background, three police officers look on. One stands while the others recline against the flyover's concrete supports, which are plastered with posters advertising Nollywood's newest releases. It is a scene of street life in Lagos. The pattern of posters, the concrete structures, the family squeezed onto a two-seater motorcycle, and the three narcoleptic policemen of the postcolony taken collectively are mundane but meaningful. This is the image that addresses readers who pick up the original printing of Teju Cole's *Every Day Is for the Thief*, which was first published in 2007 by the Nigerian publisher Cassava Republic Press. Seven years later the novel is rereleased by the publishing giant Penguin Random House and distributed transnationally. The family, police, and posters have disappeared, replaced by different cover designs in different countries. The reprinted edition features new images, revised text, and a fresh context for circulation given the author's notoriety following the positive international reception of *Open City*. Nothing in the Random House edition, save fine print in the front matter, would suggest to the reader that they are holding the author's first work, a Nigerian novel.

The migration of *Every Day*, its revisions, and its place in the author's body of writing raises a long-standing question in a new way: what are we reading when we read African writing today? Recent work on this topic has produced compelling arguments by sampling across several texts that allow us to discern patterns in contemporary literary production. Indispensable as such work has been, here I trace a slightly different route that focuses on one text and its various forms as it "migrated" from a local Nigerian readership out into the global market of "world literature." After all, the migration of people, ideas,

and commodities is not only the subject matter of new African writing. Migration is also the condition in which that writing itself exists.

So what *are* we reading? There are several ways to answer the question. First, we can interrogate the patterns that characterize what Akin Adesokan calls new African writing, including the stylistic, thematic, and generic shifts, and continuity with past generations of writers. Alternatively, we can consider the ways in which contemporary African novels circulate transnationally, which the example of *Every Day* illuminates in a unique way as the novel is revised and remarketed following its author's growing international acclaim. In this sense, examining the various versions of the book exposes the marks of the cultural production and circulation of new African writing. Finally, we can also reflect on what rises to our attention when we read a text like *Every Day* alongside, for instance, the surplus of contextual writing by Cole available online and his contributions to various magazines. An author's writing, after all, is no longer strictly mediated by vetting institutions, publishers, or the circuits of physical distribution, nor is the author in question bound to one medium. Effectively, each of these "takes" on the text corresponds with what Gérard Genette terms text, paratext, and hypertext.¹ While this chapter models one method of reading new African writing, it also turns the question of migration back onto the book and its encounter with various readerships in order to highlight the fact that many African migration narratives are themselves in migration, especially along transnational circuits of global literary marketplace.

What provides the occasion for these questions is the sense that the location of literary creation has shifted, and that this shift demands pause for reflection on "the interplay between text and context—which is to say forms of governance, modes of production, social organization, and hierarchies."² While Cole lives between Nigeria and the United States, he states that he wrote *Every Day* during visits to Lagos, and the distribution network of Cassava Republic Press ensured that the novel remained available principally to a local readership. At the time, Cassava Republic Press focused its distribution efforts on approximately sixty bookstores in Nigeria that had demonstrated reliable sales. Although relatively small, this circuit of circulation sustains the press's efforts "to take back the power of production," as the former marketing director Chinelo Onwualu put it to me.³ It also places Cassava Republic Press apart from the popular print culture centered in Somolu or Onitsha. Nevertheless, a publication like *Every Day* numbers among the narratives that abound on the continent but remain obscured by what Eileen Julien termed the extroverted African novel. Julien argues that "what African readers and readers beyond Africa think of typically as the African novel is . . . a particular type of narrative characterized above all by its intertextuality with hegemonic or global discourses and its appeal across borders."⁴ The second printing of *Every Day* illuminates how the prestige integral to a novel's turn outward toward a wider readership has as much to do with the institutions of vetting and protocols of recognition that select texts that "appeal across borders" as it does with the literary characteristics presumed to distinguish "quality" writing.

In his essay, "New African Writing and the Question of Audience," Adesokan goes further by claiming that "the external economic and cultural capital" of the global literary marketplace exerts an undue influence in the production of postcolonial fiction, such that today "the representational process through which cultural capital is reproduced in certain postcolonial novels is an indication of what writers perceive to be the market of their works."⁵ He goes on to decipher the marks of this reproduction of cultural capital in recent African fiction, which mobilizes similar generic, stylistic, and thematic conventions.⁶ Adesokan concludes that, "In spite of the impressive success on the international stage of a handful of mostly young and expatriated writers, the phenomenon called 'new African writing' stands in tension against the enormity of the cultural and political predicaments that face the continent."⁷ While undoubtedly belonging alongside other new African writing, Cole's first novel provides a productive counterpoint given its double publication. On the one hand, the reprinting of Cole's novel exposes the cultural capital that motivates the selection of *this* text and not another, while at the same time, the original Nigerian edition represents writing unmarked by the cultural capital of the global literary marketplace. In other words, the rerelease of the novel by Cole's publisher in the United States on the heels of *Open City* demonstrates precisely the kind of recognition that, for better or worse, promotes new African writing and turns it outward to a wider readership, but it is also what makes disputable the notion that this novel anticipates a Western audience's expectations about the continent or how it should write itself into the world.

Within the narrative itself, this same ambiguity characterizes, for instance, the narrator's tendency to speak as if bearing witness to the political and social dilemmas of the city, while doing so from a decidedly removed and worldly vantage point. Organized around vignettes of the unnamed narrator's return to Lagos, *Every Day* begins and ends in New York City, where the narrator lives, establishing from the outset a distance that is both geographic and emotional. After all, "going home *should* be a thing of joy," as one of the narrator's compatriots laments aloud in the consulate waiting room.⁸ The position from which the narrator speaks about the woes and wonders of returning to the city fluctuates, exposing a gap that underscores "the salience of diaspora [and migration] for understanding the primary conditions of production and reception of much that falls under the rubric of postcolonialism."⁹ The narrator's migration is specifically movement within the black diaspora—rather than of exile or asylum-seeking, an important distinction as Ato Quayson notes—that frames the relationship between place and subjectivity in the novel. The narrator's articulated and unarticulated alienation upon returning "home" opens up the space for him to grapple with the competing discomfort and desire this journey provokes.

The events of the early chapters of the novel follow naturally one from the other as the protagonist, a dual citizen, travels to the Nigerian consulate in New York City to obtain a new Nigerian passport. Upon his arrival at Murtala Muhammad Airport in Lagos, he is rankled by the venality of officials who

accost him with “Ki le mu wa fun wa?” (What did you bring for us?) The euphemism cloaks bribery in a casual appeal and masks it with the cultural expectations of gift-bearing. His impressions of the city of his childhood are marred by such improprieties. He cannot ignore the police preying on drivers at the major intersections, nor the young men drafting 419 emails at his neighborhood cyber café. While reconnecting with relatives during an engagement ceremony, the protagonist learns of the hardship experienced by families who remained in Lagos during the tumultuous years of the 1990s, including the home invasion by armed robbers that ended in the death of his uncle. Subsequent chapters settle into the character’s daily routine and highlight moments of joy upon meeting a cousin born after he left home—“she moves so easily all I could think of was sunlight”—or observing a fellow passenger reading especially *literary* literature in a danfo bus—it “makes my heart leap up in my mouth and thrash about like a catfish in a bucket: Michael Ondaatje. One of my favourites . . . A reader of Ondaatje in these circumstances: it is incongruous. I could hardly be more surprised had she been singing a tune from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*.”¹⁰ I argue that from these moments onward the novel largely turns on the tension between the protagonist, who is positioned increasingly by his dogged passion for the arts and humanist principles, and the place Lagos has become in his absence, namely one that strains these impulses. He objects to the new ministries of prosperity, pastors with private jets, and the disdain that such religiosity cultivates for humanist ideals like his own. He visits the National Museum and laments the ineptitude of public institutions and, more importantly, the erasure of Nigerian cultural and national history by neglect and misinformation. He tries to decipher the signs surrounding him for truths about the city in this historical moment, but remains frustrated or baffled by the pervasiveness of religiosity, corruption, extortion, violence, and the dilemma of others’ everyday survival.

Every Day is an especially kinetic novel. Composed in a style closer to a diary than a novel, we are inevitably positioned alongside a protagonist-narrator who speaks about the city with a tone of detachment characteristic of Cole’s protagonists to date. As the narrator walks the city, his movement gives rise to various encounters, while his own narration of these encounters also takes unexpected turns and shifts in positionality. One chapter begins, “The air in the strange, familiar environment of this city is dense with story,” calling to mind a commonplace motif of city writing, albeit in stylistically innovative syntax. The narrator’s celebration of the storied city takes an unsettling turn, however, as he offers his first city story.

One morning, walking outside the estate to where the Isheri Road joins the Lagos-Sagamu Expressway Bridge, I witness a collision between two cars. Immediately, both drivers shut off their engines, jump out of their vehicles, and start beating each other up. They fight fiercely but without malice, as if this is an ancient ritual they both have to undergo, less for the right of way than to prove their manliness. When someone from the

gathering crowd eventually pulls them apart, I see that one of the men is bleeding at the mouth. Well, this is wonderful, I think. Life hangs out here.¹¹

Two striking dissonances emerge. The narrator describes the events in an objective and removed fashion typical of the novel's mode of address and narrative vantage point, but he also deploys the puzzling simile of "an ancient ritual," which looks past the scuffle toward a profound truth of city life inscribed in the scene. Perhaps the narrator speaks here in a wry mockery of the false grandiosity of Lagosian masculinity and its irascible fragility, one might suppose. But that mockery would mark a dissonance with the celebration, a moment before, of city stories and it would not account for the second dissonance of the passage. Standing as witness to a fight, the narrator remarks, oddly enough, "Well, this is wonderful." We might suppose the reversal of expectations is intended, the narrator's effort to draw from this indecorous instance some sense of the vitality—"Life hangs out here"—of the city. But another reading seems more readily available. The narrator is out of step with life in Lagos, caught up in a vision of life-turned-art in the city. After all, as the narrator confesses, "It is an appalling way to conduct a society, yes, but I suddenly feel a vague pity for all those writers who have to ply their trade from sleepy American suburbs, writing divorce scenes symbolized by the very slow washing of dishes. Had John Updike been African, he would have won the Nobel Prize twenty years ago."¹² Even here we find another unexpected turn in the narrator's stream of thought, which glosses over the society in question and its faults—enough having been said?—and takes up the image of Updike as African Nobel Laureate. How are readers meant to regard this protagonist, and how quickly the exhilaration of Lagos street life gives way to his indignation with bribery, religiosity, and the paucity of arts and culture?

To say this is a novel about Lagos or a series of urban vignettes is to overlook the character who crafts these vignettes for the reader and what we learn about this figure of the diaspora returning home. His tone of removed observation and subtle critique, a style of narrative voice that Cole develops further in *Open City*, clears a space for the narrator to articulate his misgivings about the direction Nigerian society has taken since his emigration. His misgivings fall short of the type of full-throated critique that would be in keeping with past paradigms of African writing that sought to redress the shortcomings of society. Instead the narrative voice accommodates, or even encourages shifting interpretations, demonstrating the degree to which the production of meaning is, as Julien puts it, "a contemporary process in multiple localities."¹³ Furthermore, when the book leaves its primary sphere of concern and circulates globally, the ambiguous position of the narrator and the shifting meanings of the narrative become further unmoored from the place, experience, and memory that ground the novel's critical reflection on life in Lagos.

Refocusing our attention from text to paratext allows us to move beyond hypothesizing a relationship between the novel's circulation and the

construction of its meaning. What is evident is that the book's mode of addressing its implied audience changes when it enters a new sphere of literary circulation. When Random House republished the novel in 2014, it first underwent minor revisions, including slight deletions and small additions to the text, as well as a significant reworking of the paratext. This is not an uncommon practice when books cross borders, it seems.¹⁴ In the original edition of *Every Day*, the author's note explains that the novel was written after the author "revisited Lagos after a long absence" but that, nonetheless, the narrator should not be conflated with the author himself or the novel confused with nonfiction. This note was removed in revisions. The author does not directly address readers but is instead presented to readers as the author of *Open City*, the winner of respected literary awards, a photographer, and art scholar with an impressive range of expertise. Fascinatingly, one edition notes the author was "born in the United States in 1975 and raised in Nigeria." Another notes he "was brought up in Nigeria and moved to the USA in 1992." The original edition simply has him "currently based in New York." I do not note the differences in order to impugn the author—after all, some of the best stories storytellers tell are about themselves and their origins—but to note the way each edition constructs the book and its author to position them vis-à-vis a readership. The direct address of the original edition anticipated the text's reception, encouraged the reader to engage the challenge of the stories to come, and sought to disambiguate the roles of narrative speaker and writer without foreclosing upon the richness other forms of ambiguity might provide. Cole writes,

I have sought to capture a contemporary moment in the life of the city in which I grew up. Much of the impetus comes from real-life events. The unnamed narrator of the story is similar to me in certain ways, and different in some other ways. But he and I are not the same person. My hope is that the fictional story I've told through him is, in the deepest sense of the word, true.¹⁵

In subsequent editions, however, the author's notes perform an entirely different albeit standard function "to reassure the reader of the literariness of the text and the author's insertion into the metropolitan literary world."¹⁶ We might alternately suppose one text presumes and addresses a particular audience, while the others address a generally anonymous readership, which is to say that after *Every Day* is released to international circulation, it changes how it addresses its readers, perhaps inevitably, since circuits of literary circulation construct their own readership.

This raises another sense in which we can ask what we are reading. Interrogating the text and paratext allows us to read the marks that transnational circulation leaves on new African writing, the concern often being that the African writing that reaches readers beyond the continent is increasingly writing that can be commoditized and marketed. Adesokan writes pointedly

about the economic forces surrounding cultural production, and specifically the “logic of commodification” that prefers “an agreeable kind of postcolonial African narrative” and “in which *certain kinds of postcolonial reality* find their niche” but not others.¹⁷ He goes on to define these new conditions of literary production as they diverge from past paradigms, especially “the nationalist perspective on the novel as a cultural object,” which held that “it will amount to a kind of triumph if the audience becomes the market, *not vice-versa*.”¹⁸ In his discussion, Adesokan makes the distinction between the *market* and the *audience* of new African writing, a distinction that offers a useful language for distinguishing between at least two modes of constructing a readership, two ways of hailing the reader.¹⁹ The distinction crops up elsewhere, for instance, when Julien voices skepticism for writing that is “‘playing to the market’ rather than to the audience.”²⁰ By contrast, Pieter Vermeulen seems to take for granted that books exist in a literary market as commodities that implicitly promise various affective experiences from pleasure to wonder to horror and everything in between. Resistance, he argues, should be sought at moments in the narration that refuse to satisfy the promised affective experience, thereby asserting the artwork’s relative autonomy from the literary marketplace. In each case, concern turns on how the readership for African writing is constructed: as a demographic of readers whose “investment” in the narrative is shaped by the circulation and marketing of the book, or as a public receptive to the way the novel addresses itself to a collectivity.

In this regard, *Every Day* is again illuminating for having been first published for a local readership in Nigeria and later rereleased with an international readership in mind. What the example of *Every Day* demonstrates is that these terms do not simply describe two ideological frameworks for understanding readership, but that readers indeed encounter a book differently when it is intended for a particular audience or market. In other words, we must now ask ourselves which version of the book we pick up.

While the revisions to the text are slight and would not rise, in my opinion, to the level of being meaningfully different—aside from the omission of the author’s note and the re-presentation of the author in light of *Open City*, which is meaningful—the revised images that appear within the text could not be more different. In fact, all the author’s photographs were substituted with new photographs also by the author. Interspersed between paragraphs, the photographs in the Cassava Republic edition are cropped into small sizes that suffer from a high contrast between light and dark. Due to the low quality and small size, many of the images cannot be fully appreciated, surely a consequence of the limitations of the printing processes. Still, a number of remarkable shots include a media shop with television sets and speakers stacked in rows, a pile of oranges arranged in a pyramid and framed in close-up to emphasize shape and shadow, as well as the cover image described above, which also appears inside the text. Taken together, Cole’s photographs evoke the mundane details of the city his narrator visits, although their direct connection to the text and what role they play are not always clear. Few of the images offer a sense of clear

spatial bearings, or capture iconic landmarks, or aim to represent Lagos by way of recognizable imagery.

The photographs of the Random House edition, by comparison, clearly enjoy the benefit of the publisher's resources. Although black and white, the contrast levels ensure none of the shadows create the black pools of ink evident in the first edition. These photographs do not share space on the page with text, and some even stretch across two pages, which allows for a more detailed printing of the image and thereby brings the images to the foreground of the reader's attention. A number of them depict mundane city life with the same intimate attention to detail that is evident in the original edition's photographs. Others seem, like the oranges above, interested in rendering objects in close-up to create abstraction rather than representation. Others still present more recognizable elements of life in Lagos. One depicts the Eyo masquerade, for instance, which takes place only in Lagos and constitutes an important element of the cultural history of the city. The new images also demonstrate a more direct relationship between narrative and image, text and paratext. In one passage the narrator recounts the history of Nigeria's role in the transatlantic slave trade, the hundreds of thousands of enslaved people bought and transported by Spanish, Portuguese, and Brazilian slavers, and the absence of any site of memory of the slave trade in Lagos. Cole writes, "This history is missing from Lagos. There is no monument to the great wound. There is no day of remembrance, no commemorative museum."²¹ The image on the following page conjures this past, bringing to mind this absent history. A gauzy fishing net in sharp focus is draped across the frame close enough to note the texture of fibers. Behind the netting three figures in profile stand in a line, their silhouettes appear like the shadows of enslaved ancestors. This passage and image stand out as the novel's only evocation of the movement of black bodies via the middle passage.

The reissued edition does not merely add new images, but through those images puts the novel into dialogue with these platforms on which the author engages with his readership, opening up a link to the author's other texts produced between the original and second edition of *Every Day*. If we take the multiple localities of textual interpretation to include text, paratext, and hypertext, then it bears noting that Teju Cole is today well known to international audiences for his Instagram and Twitter accounts, as well as his column in the *New York Times Magazine* and occasional contributions to the *Atlantic*. This is in keeping with the larger migration of African writing to the digital sphere, and just as "we can no longer assume that publishing is synonymous with the production of books," as Simon Gikandi insists, perhaps inevitably the practice of literary interpretation will no longer be synonymous only with the reading of books.²² Indeed, some of the photographs added to the second edition of *Every Day* also appear in Cole's Instagram feed.²³ Other images on Cole's Instagram could so easily have appeared in the novel, such as one photograph of a modest bed below a window and the shaft of sunlight that illuminates the worn sheets and chipped spots on the blue-green wall. The photograph was

taken in his grandmother's house in Sagamu, north of Lagos, during a visit home in December 2014. A small meditation that accompanies the image connects a public comment the author made to the private emotion and memory it evoked, the comment about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the memory of his grandmother.²⁴ As with *Every Day's* vignettes of Lagos life, this fragment expresses an intimate knowledge and experience of a place and remains mindful of a connection to the world at large. It also demonstrates Cole's consistency of style across print and online spaces, even as the author's overlapping literary and photographic practices also complicate any simple notion of readership, with Cole's readership today including multiple platforms and artistic media. While it is important to note, of course, that Cole holds the megaphone of Random House, making it easier to have his voice heard across platforms, it is also true that online publication today continues to multiply the locations of writing and reading.

Just as these new images connect the old text to another body of images outside the book, so too the author's writing online reframes the reader's relation to the book. For example, one of Cole's most popular series of tweets, titled "Small Fates," grew out of experiences the author had while writing *Every Day*. Whether one first read *Every Day* in its original Nigerian edition or its reissued transnational edition, the "Small Fates" project would read like either the epilogue to a first novel or prologue of more writing yet to come. Cole writes in an essay on his Web site that the project began as an adaptation of a journalistic genre called *faits divers*, which are short incidents or sensational new briefs, precisely like the brief report about the death by suicide of a Senegalese domestic in southern France on which Ousmane Sembène based his film *La noire de . . .*²⁵ The author took to Twitter to grow a readership around this atypical daily practice, writing his own *fait divers* "about the small fates of ordinary people." He explains:

The idea is not to show that Lagos, or Abuja, or Owerri, are worse than New York, or worse than Paris. Rather, it's a modest goal: to show that what happens in the rest of the world happens in Nigeria too, with a little craziness all our own mixed in. In this odd sort of way, bad news is good news because these instances of bad news reveal a whole world of ongoing human experience that is often ignored or oversimplified.²⁶

Given the similar style and conceptual germ, we might infer that the vignettes of *Every Day* aim for the same modest goal of writing Lagos into the global mundane or cosmopolitan ordinariness of modernity.

However, while there is merit to the notion that bad news is good news because it defies oversimplifications and exceptionalism that often overly determines the representation of Africa, there are also those for whom bad news will be good news because it confirms the odious exceptionalism that links Africa with failure. In short, there are readers for whom it is good news because it is simply bad. My argument here is that the circuits and forms in which the book

circulates can often determine where the emphasis lands and that, for instance, the composition of the book can reconfigure narrative meaning, and even the author's intent, by amplifying the off-color moments of everyday life in Lagos. Curiously enough, one of the most puzzling and challenging passages of *Every Day* reflects precisely on this problematic. In the passage, the narrator ostensibly witnesses the lynching of a boy accused of stealing in the marketplace. In a style that plays with space, presence, and memory, the narrative recounts the event in present tense—"An old car tire—from where?—has been sourced. The boy's clothes are torn off, he is knocked down repeatedly"—only to reveal the entire event as the daydreaming of the narrator, a hypothetical lynching, or rather a lynching he heard of and imagines unfolding again before his eyes. "I have come for this, to see with my own eyes where this thing happened."²⁷ The witness, therefore, is not in fact present for the event, although his presence at the space allows his memory to call the violent killing to mind. "In a new twist," as the narrator relates it, the original witness comes to the foreground: "a man with a digital camcorder. The single eye of his machine collects the event: this fragile body, which, shed of clothes, is now like a dark sapling whipped about in the wind."²⁸ The passage continues its play between immediacy and delay, immediate presence and distance, bearing witness and recalling to memory, but it concludes in another turn—now typical of Cole—away from the anticipated object of our attention toward the fate of the digital camcorder's tape:

The man with the digicam lowers his machine. He, too, disappears. Traffic quickly reconstitutes around the charred pile. The air smells of rubber, meat, and exhaust.

In a few days, it will be as though nothing happened. There are those who will copy the tape, it will move around, perhaps provide some grim entertainment for the men in the shops, or in police stations, or homes. It will finally be broadcast on the national news, to outrage, and to an instant forgetting. I cannot hunt the tape down, but I hear about it here and there.²⁹

With this narrative gesture, we further retreat from the physical space of the marketplace into the realm of visual representation, the imagination, and memory, which allows the narrator to critique the violent lynching as well as the compounded injustice of its mediation, circulation, and transformation into a bit of "grim entertainment" that provokes "outrage, and an instant forgetting." It is worth noting, moreover, that Cole voiced a personal denunciation of the practice of vigilante killings in an *Atlantic* article following the Aluu four murders in the fall of 2012 in Nigeria, a vigilante killing that was mediated almost exactly as the narrator describes, captured with a mobile phone camera and circulated on national television and online media.³⁰ His rebuke of mob violence in that essay is joined with the hope that "Nigerians now have a chance to think about the subject too long considered just a part of life. The outrage could even lead to legislation."³¹

In the original publication, no photograph accompanies this passage with its critical reflection on the mediation of violence, while the republished edition punctuates the passage with one of the most spectacular images of the book. In the darkness that envelopes Lagos during a power outage at night, we see at a distance the top portion of a rising column of smoke and flame, although a concrete wall obscures our view of the source of fire beneath. The headlights from traffic cast shadows on the wall, but it is the car speeding and the young man running right to left across the frame that captures our attention. What could this incendiary image evoke for the reader, the smell of the air of the marketplace tinged, as the narrator details, by rubber, exhaust, and human remains? Ironically, although the original novel addresses a smaller readership conscribed by the reach of the publisher's distribution, the way the text was printed, the relationship between text and paratext, narrative and image, holds open "a heterogeneity of reception," to borrow a term.³² By contrast, while the new images demonstrate a higher quality, a more pronounced role in the experience of the book, some moments of intertextuality between narrative and image, such as the above, pin down the meaning of the text, or narrow the range of readings into something more attuned to the expectations of "the market-reader," a term Graham Huggan extrapolates from Wendy Waring's original use.³³ Finally, while the call for social change made by a challenging passage like the above might be answered by those in a position to act, it must be considered that the image conjured in the written text and amplified in the paratext can easily be folded into contemporary media motifs, from child soldier narratives to humanitarian intervention rhetoric, that associate Africa, as Adesokan warns, with violence and crisis.

The final image in the Cassava Republic edition shows an airplane poised to take off, corresponding simply enough with the narrator's own return to New York City. In this final chapter, the narrator looks out his apartment window at the snow-covered streets as "a memory of Lagos returns to me, a moment in my brief journey that stands out of time."³⁴ The chapter brilliantly proceeds to draw us into the memory, situating us with the narrator in an unassuming back alley, where he observes a workshop of carpenters producing rows of coffins. The narrator initially mistakes the coffins for boats in storage, and his mind seems to reproduce the metaphor when he describes the workshop as "an uncanny place, this dockyard of Charon."³⁵ The coffins thus remain boats in this undecided metaphor from Greek mythology, and taken together as they are the set of associations could be extrapolated to include the slave ships cited earlier in the narrative, and the city's history in that global migration of the middle passage. However, the narrator concludes by deferring to the vantage point of the carpenters, who are imagined as having a sense of the totality of life in Lagos by virtue of making their living around the dead. "This is the street to which the people of old Lagos, right across the social classes, come when someone dies. . . . The carpenters, I am sure, have borne witness to all this."³⁶ The novel ends, in other words, by reaching for an Archimedean point where the contradictions and complexities of the preceding vignettes can be resolved

and a full image of the city can be grasped. The narrative achieves this resolution by turning to the dead, ending literally in the ritual washing of a dead body, which evokes the long-standing literary motif that all are equal in death.

In the republished edition available to readers outside Nigeria, the final image depicts two children atop a dugout canoe in Makoko, performing a different role in the narrative by pairing the narrator's memory with an image of one of the most visibly impoverished—not to mention most frequently photographed—neighborhoods of Lagos. The canoe drifts toward the camera, creating ripples in the putrid water of the lagoon, where bits of refuse break the opaque, glassy surface of the water. One of the boys wears an immaculate white gown and stands at the canoe's prow; his shoulders face the camera squarely and his hands are folded over his lap. The other boy places his foot on the gunwale to steady himself as he points at the camera. Surrounding the boys are the makeshift homes built on stilts just above the polluted water of the Lagoon, homes that are under continual threat of demolition by the Lagos State government, while also the object of foreign journalists' fascination.

The image adorns the final page in *all* new editions but appears, furthermore, as the cover image affixed to the reissued edition printed by Faber and Faber for distribution in the United Kingdom. The sides are cropped to foreground the boys and canoe, one stilted shanty floats in the background, and the title *Every Day* hangs in liquid red characters above the scene and below the author's name. The bottom of the cover design reads: "By the author of *Open City*." It is easy to imagine how this use of the photograph dramatically shifts one's encounter with the book—which may explain why Faber and Faber has since opted for a less sensationalist design—and with the image where it appears inside the text in dialogue with the end of narrative. Obviously, the cover image is shorn of the context that the written word and narrative organization provide, such as the allusion to the coffin carpenters' intimate relationship to death, the washing of a dead body, and the narrator's reaching for a resolution to the paradoxes of Lagos. Divorced from this intertextuality, the photograph becomes what Rancière calls the naked image, or "the trace of history, of testimony to a reality that is generally accepted not to tolerate any other form of presentation."³⁷ The naked image is one we understand as the index of a reality that cannot or should not wear the label of art, a reality "whose suffering and exhaustion confront us and suspend any aesthetic appreciation."³⁸ The narrator has, for example, an inkling that the scene of the coffins would not tolerate aesthetic representation: "I want to take the little camera out of my pocket and capture the scene. But I am afraid. Afraid that the carpenters, rapt in their meditative task, will look up at me; afraid that I will bind to film what is intended only for the memory; what is meant only for a sidelong glance followed by forgetting."³⁹ In other words, a naked image cannot be read otherwise. But that one reading to which we are obliged is nevertheless a reading learned. As Rancière argues, the recognition of meaning in the image "is itself a product of an aesthetic education."⁴⁰ More than a theory of spectatorship or reception, Rancière indicates that even with an image that seems naked

in its meaning, we produce the meaning of the image from a genealogy of other images and stories that depict, in this case, extreme immiseration. Or to extrapolate to the concerns of this chapter, it is a claim about the intertextuality of images and stories that circulate alongside one another. While we cannot say with any certainty what the book will mean to readers within the global literary sphere given the multiple, shifting locations of its meaning, that meaning emerges in relation with other texts and images that circulate in a similar fashion to the same readership, including other new African writing as well as the abundance of other representations of Africa.

While the cover image of a Lagos slum appears on but one version of the book printed in the United Kingdom, consider that image in comparison with that of the original Nigerian publication: the family on a speeding motorcycle, police officers in listless poses, the wall covered in Nollywood posters. Between these two books is a distance—geographic, temporal, aesthetic, affective—that traces the migration of *Every Day* from one circuit of literary production and consumption to another broader, transnational circuit. This material migration is not only evident in the physical book, but also the words and image on the page, the mode of address, and the kinds of readership it constructs, all of which speaks to the changing nature, location, and audience of African literature today. We should resist, to the extent possible, the notion that global circulation invariably subjects the novel to the worst of Western prejudices, since to do so forecloses the heterogeneous reading positions that remain possible or even multiply given such circulation. Nevertheless, as the interrogation of this text bears out, the position from which one reads a text necessarily recombines with the circulation of other images and texts in the “scapes” of globalization. Our reading practices should take account of this fact since, just as migration constitutes the subject of many new African novels, migration is also the condition to which these books are themselves subject.

Notes

1. Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).
2. Eileen Julien, “The Critical Present: Where Is ‘African Literature’?,” in *Rethinking African Cultural Production*, ed. Frieda Ekotto and Kenneth Harrow (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 18.
3. Personal communication, September 3, 2016.
4. Eileen Julien, “The Extroverted African Novel,” *History, Geography, and Culture*, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 684. “Extroverted,” Julien’s key term, has been commonly misunderstood as describing African writing that addresses itself to a Western readership and seeks to fulfill a Western audience’s expectations about the continent and how it should write itself into the world. Unfortunately, such a reading misconstrues

precisely the push against Eurocentric assumptions of literary dominance and normativity that Julien intends to undermine in her essay.

5. Akin Adesokan, "New African Writing and the Question of Audience," *Research in African Literatures* 43, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 2–3.

6. Elsewhere in his essay, Adesokan summarizes that "these novels share five features: they are mostly written by women; they are focalized from the perspectives of culturally innocent or marginal protagonists; they thematize the emotional consequences of familial or public upheavals; they are not too long, but if they are, they compensate for their length by being formally or linguistically nonexperimental; and they end happily, or at any rate, not too grimly" (4).

7. Adesokan, "New African Writing," 16. Adesokan is certainly not alone in raising alarm at the representations of Africa that would seem to appeal most to the global literary sphere. Eileen Julien also sounds a cautionary note about the ease with which stories of violence, crisis, and immiserization, and other such fictions "find ready audiences" (Julien, "The Extroverted African Novel," 684).

8. Teju Cole, *Every Day Is for the Thief* (Abuja, Nigeria: Cassava Republic Press, 2007), 6.

9. Ato Quayson, "Postcolonialism and the Diasporic Imaginary," in *A Companion to Diaspora and Transnationalism*, ed. Ato Quayson and Girish Daswani (London: Blackwell, 2013), 140.

10. Cole, *Every Day*, 30, 36.

11. *Ibid.*, 65.

12. *Ibid.*, 65–66.

13. Julien, "The Critical Present," 25.

14. See also Wendy Waring, "Is This Your Book?: Writing Postcolonial Fiction for the Global Market," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 22, nos. 3–4 (1995): 455–65; Allison Fagan, "Damaged Pieces: Embracing Border Textuality in Revisions of Ana Castillo's 'Sapogonia,'" *MELUS* 37, no. 3 (2012): 167–88; Martin Paul Eve's "You Have to Keep Track of Your Changes': The Version Variants and Publishing History of David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*," *Open Library of Humanities* 2, no. 2 (2016): 1–34, and surely countless other examples.

15. Cole, *Every Day*, 6.

16. Waring, "Is This Your Book?," 464.

17. Adesokan, "New African Writing," 12, 13; emphasis added.

18. *Ibid.*, 3; original emphasis. I agree with Adesokan, but would only add here that it is possible to recognize this same aspiration today independently of a nationalist cultural ideology. It is still viewed, after all, as a social good that a local readership has access to the works of local writers, even if that is achieved through a local literary "market."

19. Pieter Vermeulen writes about Teju Cole from a position that assumes the pervasiveness of the market, assumes that literature exists within a market (within, that is, a set of economic forces and tendencies). The way that Vermeulen and Adesokan talk about "the market" differs, but the two perspectives

complement one another insofar as they indicate that readerships under global capitalism are constructed as a demographic of potential consumers whose engagement with the text—and whose access to a text among an array of African writing—is circumscribed and shaped by the economic conditions in which a text circulates globally. Furthermore, Adesokan's argument reminds us that "according to the nationalist perspective on the novel as a cultural object, it will amount to a kind of triumph if the audience becomes the market, *not vice-versa*." Pieter Vermeulen, "Reading Alongside the Market: Affect and Mobility in Contemporary American Migrant Fiction," *Textual Practice* 29, no. 2 (2015): 3. I would only add here that it is possible to recognize this same aspiration today independently of a nationalist cultural ideology. It is still viewed, after all, as a social good that a local readership has access to the works of local writers, even if that is achieved through a local literary "market." See also Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margin* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

20. Julien, "The Critical Present," 21.

21. Cole, *Every Day*, 114.

22. Simon Gikandi, Editor's Column, "The Work of the Book in the Age of Electronic Reproduction," *PMLA* 127, no. 2 (2012): 202.

23. See link: <https://www.instagram.com/p/BD81hS7vVnZ/>.

24. The full post reads: "Sagamu, December 2014. In my speech in Dallas, I mentioned that had the murderers not gotten him, Dr. King might well be with us today. He would be 87. He would have continued the work, in ways increasingly uncomfortable for his admirers. I always think about my grandmother, the way she holds on to my hand after we have embraced. 'I want to feel your hand,' she says, 'I want your hand touching mine.' So we hold hands and talk. (This is a photograph from her house, of the room where the young woman who takes care of her sleeps.) My grandmother is two months older than Dr. King, and with us still, alhamdulillah. When I spoke in Dallas about the possibility Dr. King could still be with us had he not been murdered by white supremacists (in fifteen years, we won't speak of this possibility), I felt a sudden upsurge of anger"; <https://www.instagram.com/p/BA234tLPVm5>.

25. Here is one example of Cole's own take on the *fait divers* genre: "In Ikotun, Mrs Ojo, who was terrified of armed robbers, died in her barricaded home, of smoke inhalation."

26. Teju Cole, "Small Fates," *Teju Cole*, 2011, <http://www.tejucole.com/other-words/small-fates/>.

27. Cole, *Every Day*, 60.

28. *Ibid.*, 60–61.

29. *Ibid.*, 61.

30. On October 5, 2012, four students of the University of Port Harcourt entered the nearby community of Aluu, reportedly to collect a debt owed to one of the young men. In response, the debtor raised the alarm and accused the four students of stealing laptops and mobile phones, although some accounts suggest the four did attempt to seize the debtor's belongings. Some

accounts also note the village had seen several recent incidences of armed robbery without response by the police. The accused were taken, stripped, beaten, and ultimately lynched in the same fashion described in Cole's passage. A bystander, using a mobile phone, captured gruesome footage of the killings, which went viral and drew condemnation from the Nigerian public, government officials, and incited protests in Aluu by University of Port Harcourt students that reportedly turned violent.

31. Teju Cole, "'Perplexed . . . Perplexed': On Mob Justice in Nigeria," *The Atlantic* (2012), <http://www.theatlantic.com/international>.

32. Waring, "Is This Your Book?," 462.

33. Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, 166–67.

34. Cole, *Every Day*, 158.

35. *Ibid.*, 159, 161.

36. *Ibid.*, 162.

37. Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, trans. Gregory Elliot (New York: Verso, 2007), 23.

38. *Ibid.*, 26.

39. Cole, *Every Day*, 161.

40. Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, 27.

Speculative Migration and the Project of Futurity in Sylvestre Amoussou's *Africa Paradis*

MaryEllen Higgins

Julia Erhart describes speculative fiction as an artistic rendition of “what if.” One thread of the speculative genre is the reversal: what if situations were inverted, what if current hierarchies were flipped? Sylvestre Amoussou’s film *Africa Paradis* envisions reversals of contemporary migration patterns and a *peripeteia*, or reversal of fortune, in economic terms. In *Africa Paradis*, devastated European characters, caught in environmental disasters and civil wars between European countries, struggle to migrate to a prosperous, united Africa. While the general direction of imagined future exile is reversed, the representations of border policing resemble present political terrains: familiar cases of xenophobia, discrimination, violence toward migrants *sans papiers*, paternalistic humanitarianisms, and race-based exclusions abound. There are the familiar lines at embassies, as well as the familiar assignments of manual labor to well-educated, professional migrants whose expertise is not recognized in the new metropolis. There are the smuggling networks, the detention centers, and the scapegoating of the *sans papiers*.

In his article on *Africa Paradis*, which he compares to Abdourahman Waberi’s *United States of Africa*, Michael Janis remarks that Amoussou’s speculations do not invent “a different world,” but are “a mirror image of our present geopolitical tragedy.”¹ Taiwo Adetunji Osinubi likewise observes “readily recognizable situations of African communities.”² Indeed, familiar debates about the status of immigrants are foregrounded in *Africa Paradis*, except that the immigrants are Europeans and the visa-issuers are Africans. Amoussou himself plays the role of Monsieur Modibo Koudossou, deputy of the Liberal Party in Africa, who plans to introduce a bill that will allow “white integration” into the United States of Africa, or the USAF. The liberal Modibo proposes that

immigrants working for five years be allowed to apply for African nationality if they wish, and that qualified immigrants be permitted to obtain jobs beyond the menial ones they are currently eligible for. The integration of migrants is opposed by the character Monsieur Yokossi, the deputy of the Patriotic Party, who states publicly, “Ils sont totalement différent de nous” (They are totally different from us), and “Un blanc ne vaudra jamais un noir” (A white will never be worth a black). Yokossi’s words echo the rhetoric of French politicians who oppose African migration, particularly the rhetoric of the Front National (FN), which views itself as the defender of French national identity and paints a sweeping portrait of “clandestine” African immigrants as markedly different, inferior others. Beyond the FN, Yokossi’s proposals in *Africa Paradis* resemble the projects of former President Nicolas Sarkozy, who made illegal immigration a focus of his 2006–7 presidential campaign, who referred to disaffected, rioting youth in the *banlieus* as *racaille* (scum),³ and who created the Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Co-Development in 2007, a year after the film was released.⁴ As Dominic Thomas argues, Sarkozy positioned migrants from Africa in particular as undesirable, risky, and intolerable, as he reinforced the “belief that *national identity* had been eroded.”⁵ Thus, the Patriotic Party’s arguments in the film echo both the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) under Sarkozy and the Front National (under Jean-Marie Le Pen, and subsequently under his daughter Marine Le Pen), which “have attempted to build support by fostering the sentiment that France is under threat.”⁶

One question that drives this chapter is whether the imagined reversal sustains a reliance on the original model, as Michael Syrotinski, in *Singular Performances*, suggests of inversions, or whether Amoussou’s reinscriptions of migrant subjects employ alternative models of selfhood, migration, national identity, or belonging. Do Amoussou’s speculations envision what Frantz Fanon warns against: a transformation of Africa into a place that resembles Europe? Fanon writes in *The Wretched of the Earth*, “If we want to respond to the expectations of Europeans we must not send them back a reflection, however ideal, of their society and their thought that periodically even sickens them. . . . For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must make a new start, develop a new way of thinking, and endeavor to create a new man.”⁷

On the surface, it appears that the speculative reversal of migration flows in *Africa Paradis* does not follow Fanon’s call to innovate, to develop a new way of thinking about humanity. Because the film’s imagined right-wing African politicians speak very much like current ethnonationalist politicians outside the frame, the film initially seems to reflect upon a human propensity, regardless of place or race, to possessively guard one’s privilege in a global economic hierarchy. Thus, Amoussou’s vision of Afrofuturism is in part a critical dystopia, as Janis puts it, as it ends in dead protesters and deported migrants, a vision that “makes little allowance for a world that goes beyond oppression.”⁸ However, as Laurel Bollinger writes, speculative subjectivities pose “challenges to fundamental assumptions about the Self,”⁹ and it is Amoussou’s speculative

rendering of subjectivity that prompts open questions about the self's design, the speculative "what if" of the subject. As Gregory Benford observes, speculative fiction "turns you and your social context, the social you, inside out."¹⁰ In its rendering of reversed subjectivities, the film's images and words invite imagined right-wing French spectators to hear themselves as voices transformed into right-wing, French-speaking African voices, and simultaneously see themselves in the faces of European subjects in exile, and then, through the rhetoric of anti-immigrant characters, hear echoes of their own voices of racial discrimination against their physically reimagined selves. Concurrently, spectators are invited to see a future where visions of a prosperous, united Africa are paired with a Fanonian warning about repeating Europe's ethical violations.

I would like to adapt Homi Bhabha's description of Fanon's work as a *project of futurity* to argue that Amoussou's speculative project of futurity depends not upon the rearrangement of geographical migration flows, but on our ability to reimagine subjectivities. While the setting is 2033, the film's props do not follow certain expectations of the science fiction genre. The style of the automobiles in Africa in 2033, for example, is not futuristic; indeed, just a decade after the film was released, the cars look like old models. While it contains elements of science fiction, Amoussou's work invests less in visions of futuristic landscapes and more in reimagined subjects. It is in this sense that Amoussou's project coincides with Darko Suvin's theory of science fiction as a mix of estrangement and cognition. In his discussion of "the look of estrangement," Suvin takes his cue from Bertolt Brecht, who describes estrangement as a representation that "allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar."¹¹ The "us" constructed in the exclusionary, race-based proclamations of the film's Patriotic Party leaders breaks down during its very projection, for an estranged, white right-wing spectator who shares this ideology with a black right-wing African character is the mirror version of this "us" who excludes, but it is an "us" grounded in essentialist, rigid systems of belief that do not openly imagine their reversibility. The spoken, auditory, race-based "us" is thrown into visual chaos: the film's universe of speech reconstitutes the African Patriotic Party and the Front National in France as an ideologically united *us*. If divided subjectivities can be built through modes of direct address, as Judith Butler asserts in *Senses of the Subject*, the divide becomes a contradiction in the direct address of anti-immigration politician Yokossi, who reflects the sensibilities of a spectator outside the film who advocates for the exclusion and expulsion of African immigrants.

For Suvin, the cognitive aspect of science fiction "focuses on the variable and future-bearing elements from the empirical environment," then "posits them as problems and then explores where they lead."¹² If this ideological, exclusionary "us" is to persist as the film's story progresses, that imagined right-wing spectator will be led to see himself or herself as the wrecker of havoc, the character who must create divides through the spectacle of violence during the demonstrations for integration and other forms of unity because the divisions he or she insists upon—the assumed barriers to integration—are not there.

Yet this right-wing spectator beyond the film, who will imaginatively adjust his or her subject position, is arguably a fiction, a speculation. The point, then, is that it is the very refusal to imagine a new subjectivity that becomes one site of failure in bringing the new human into being. The film's speculative reversals, in contrast to that failure of imagination, prompt open-ended inquiries about subjective adaptability, an adaptability embedded in the African Literature Association's motto: *Nkyin Nkyin*: changing oneself, playing many roles. And in the film's universe, at least, the constitution of the "you" and the "us" are theatrical.

Africa Paradis challenges spectators to examine how they look at the migrant self, the us, the them, and the you; my conception of the "you," here, follows Butler's writing, in *Senses of the Subject*, on its rehabilitation. Following Fanon and Adriana Caverero, Butler's rehabilitated "you" is a body and a consciousness restored through open-ended inquiry. In Butler's reading, a reimagined "you" emerges in two of Fanon's conclusions—both in *The Wretched of the Earth* and in his earlier work, *Black Skin, White Masks*. In the moment when "Fanon prays to his body at the end of *Black Skin, White Masks*, 'O my body, make of me always a man who questions!' he calls for a kind of openness that is at once bodily and conscious."¹³ The body, Butler writes, is brought into "open-ended inquiry"; it "accords every consciousness its status as something infinitely open."¹⁴ In further remarks on *The Wretched of the Earth*, Butler notes, "We are not given much of an idea of what the final unfolding of the human will look like. . . ."¹⁵ The "reconstruction of the human after humanism," Butler observes, regards humans as "those kinds of beings who depend on social conditions to breathe and move and live."¹⁶ In its visualization of a speculative future in which there are multiple barriers to moving and to living, Amoussou's film mourns the loss of Fanon's very project of human futurity, and critiques that project's status, to borrow some words from Langston Hughes, as a dream perpetually deferred.¹⁷

The reversal of dispossessed subjects in *Africa Paradis* opens the question of human address, opens up an insular "us" for scrutiny, as it scrutinizes the postponement—the *only after this*—of Fanon's project of futurity itself. The formation of an "us" or "we" can be an act of solidarity, but as Thomas writes, "The relationship between the us and the them—that informs a negative model of identity construction informed by exclusionary rather than inclusionary criteria—updates previous sociological paradigms used to describe hierarchies between the 'established' and 'outsiders.'"¹⁸ Within the film's recognizable anti-immigration rhetoric, which has marked the recent *droitisation* or shift in French politics toward the far right,¹⁹ we might ask who is missing in the mirror, or what lies outside the mirror's frame? Where, for example, are the Indian migrants to Africa, or the Lebanese, the Syrians, the Afrikaners, the Chinese, the *métis*, the inhabitants of multiple identities, etc., in *Africa Paradis*? Have they been expelled? As Amoussou's speculative version of a united, democratic Africa commences with a gathering of representatives in a political assembly, the question of representation emerges at the very outset. That

question, however, relies upon spectator-subjects who notice what is not there, who wonder, who speculate about the missing figures in the frame. The opening vision of Africa's imagined future leaves us with unexplained absences on the screen and, by extension, Amoussou deliberately calls into question the black and white version of subjectivity reflected in the discourses of the film's politicians and, by extension, the discourses of *droitist* France. In a further extension, which I will elaborate upon later, *Africa Paradis* also takes on the representations of right-wing, anti-immigrant visions of polarized subjectivities that stretch beyond France—to Europe and the United States.

In Caverero's version of a new future of the rehabilitated human, "the 'you' comes before the *we*, before the plural *you* and before the *they*." For Caverero, ethical doctrines mask the unfamiliar "you": they are "too preoccupied with praising the rights of the I . . . masked as a familiar you." Even in liberation movements, "The *we* is always positive, the plural *you* is a possible ally, the *they* has the face of an antagonist, the *I* is unseemly, and the *you* is, of course, superfluous."²⁰ What initially reads as a reversed binary world is muddled when we ask, as Butler asks of Sartre's preface to Fanon, about the author's (or filmmaker's, or characters') mode of address. Who is the you? Is there a "you" outside the enclosure of the frame of the film that is addressed in the film's utterances? What are spectators' relationships to the film's pronouns and possessive pronouns, those substitutions for subjects?

Given the complexities of African film distribution, the varied audiences in Paris where the film was screened in theaters, the question of access in Africa, and the informal flows of circulation, it is very difficult to measure the film's "actual" audiences. If the ideal spectator is one who understands a film's references, the implied "you" is a spectator who will identify the historical allusions in the characters' utterances and derive pleasure from their ironies. It seems reasonable to assume that much of the film's pleasurable humor relies on spectators' familiarity with the kinds of rhetorical address that the actors and actresses on screen reproduce. When the film's police chief Monsieur M'Doula, in a comic echo of Charles de Gaulle's address to a crowd in Algiers in 1958, shouts "Je vous ai compris" (I understand you) at a rally for the integration of European immigrants, the "vous" is reversed. Given M'Doula's intention to dismantle the rally, the implication is that de Gaulle did not intend to *comprendre*, to understand Africans, at all. "L'Afrique pour les Africains," the slogan uttered by Yokossi and the mantra of the Patriotic African Party, echoes Jean-Marie Le Pen's slogan, "La France aux français." Thus, at some points, Amoussou's future Africa looks like a reflection of Fortress France and, by extension, as Osinubi observes, Fortress Europe. At the same time, as Janis remarks, there are echoes of Marcus Garvey's pan-Africanism in the slogan, "Afrique pour les Africains." Still at other points, the United States of Africa resembles the United States of America, with the stars and stripes on its flag, which is seen fluttering in the film's opening images. What emerges from these multiple references is an expansion of the mirror, one that sees the world of rightist France within a globalized politics of possessive enclosure.

The murky mode of address in Amoussou's film is not as direct as Fanon's in *The Wretched of the Earth*; there is no direct appeal to "my brothers," no direct petitioning of people off screen, no breaking of the fourth wall. Nevertheless, Butler's portrayal of Sartre's positioning of the "European" in his preface to *The Wretched of the Earth* bears a resemblance to the potential visual and narrative impacts of Amoussou's film. Sartre's assertion of the white European's peripheral status in Fanon's text, Butler writes, "deconstitutes the presumptive privilege of the European reader in the act of taking in this new historical constellation."²¹ Butler continues, "Sartre's writing to the European reader is a way of acting upon the reader, positioning him outside the circle and establishing that peripheral status as an epistemological requirement for understanding the condition of colonization. The European reader undergoes a loss of privilege at the same time that he is asked to submit to an empathetic enactment with the socially excluded and effaced."²² We might expand Butler's analysis of readership here and consider how *Africa Paradis* acts upon white spectators by repositioning them into a peripheral status—not as readers but as vulnerable bodies in exile on screen—in order to facilitate empathetic understanding of the conditions of migration. In its elaborate rendering of European subjects who suffer from discrimination and violence in a place that is referred to as Paradise, *Africa Paradis* critically targets *droitist* articulations of an allegedly ideal Europe, articulations that eschew comprehension of our mutual human vulnerability. At the same time, the spectator is not a fixed subject; we cannot assume that spectators will "identify" with characters, or that spectators will hear themselves addressed by the film's delegation of voices.²³ Spatially, spectators' bodies are already on another kind of periphery, outside of the film's frame. Ultimately, it is in its open relationship to the spectator outside the frame that the film invokes questions about "identification" and the "you." As Butler writes in *Precarious Life*, "Dominant forms of representation can and must be disrupted for something about the precariousness of life to be apprehended."²⁴ Amoussou's reversal acts in part as a disruption of dominant representations by placing the white French migrant's precarity in the foreground. It is in the open question of the film's "yous," in the very speculative dimension of the film's subjects, that questions of I, you, we, us, and them become a departure for a notion of indeterminate, transcendent humanity that is persistently speculative.²⁵

Linguistic entanglements of the "you" and the "us" punctuate the film. At one point, the utterance of the pronoun "you" becomes interchangeable. When the police chief M'Doula tries to force Clémence, an advocate for assimilation and the leader of demonstrations for equal rights, to jump into a deep pit at a construction worksite, he tells her, "When you run, it's easy to trip and fall." M'Doula taunts her with the knowledge that the police will distort and control the public narrative of her struggle, yet in their scuffle, he becomes that "you" who falls in. Both are subject to the bodily perils of falling. Earlier, Clémence organizes a march that demonstrates the social cohesion of immigrants and sympathetic African supporters, an integrated "we" who walk side

by side. In order to shut down the increasingly popular integration bill, Patriotic African Party manipulators plant a shooter, a *voyou* (in the credits), a white immigrant himself, into the crowd. When the paid *voyou* shoots a police officer during the demonstrations to make it look like the protesters are violent, the crowd breaks up, the integrated “us” disperses. The media casts blame for the shots on divided European factions. The march of the integrated “us” is postponed.

This brings us to a crucial consideration in Fanon, Butler, and in Amousou’s film: the role of violence in the processes of separation and enclosure, and in the forestallment of the new human. The reinvention of the human, in Fanon, emerges after violent revolution. Violence is not a moral ideal in itself; the ideal is imagined in the aftermath. In *Africa Paradis*, violence is the protector of the status quo “us” and the barrier to a new cosmopolitan “us.” If, as Butler writes, “we have to ask whether violence continues to play a role in what it means to create oneself,”²⁶ then we may also ask if violence continues to play a role in the self’s enclosure or exclusion. One of the film’s central characters, the undocumented French computer engineer Olivier, is targeted by the police, who want to capture him, and who look forward to beating him. Olivier is viewed as an inferior subject undeserving of the rights of citizenship. His experiences reflect Alec Hargreaves’s assertion that hostility and discrimination are barriers that become “all the more potent if they have the backing of the state.”²⁷ Clémence, the activist who inspires Olivier to consider himself as a political subject, dies from a policeman’s gunshot. After the violence, further enclosures.

If I may expand upon Fanon’s depiction of colonized, immobile subjects to include migrant subjects who are similarly hemmed in, then one might ask why the restricted and afflicted migrant body has not opened future notions of new humans, united by our precarity. In Butler’s interpretations of Fanon and Sartre, she reads a future state of humankind that redefines itself in terms of its infinitely open, embodied consciousness, as well as its recognition of “the reciprocal requirements that human embodiment implies: food, shelter, protection of life and liberty, means of recognition, and conditions for work and political participation without which no human can emerge or be sustained.”²⁸ The embodied, conscious experiences of migration—the search for stable access to shelter, liberty, and work—bring our mutual need for healthy social conditions to the fore. The problem with Modibo’s liberal arguments for inclusion is that they merely reverse the arguments for exclusion, which hinge on perceived group needs and non-needs in terms of human labor. His plea is “Nous avons besoin des étrangers” (We need foreigners). When Olivier asks Africa’s embassy representative in France, “Do you need us or not?” the representative responds, “Besoin, besoin . . . ce n’est pas un mot qui convient” (Need, need . . . it’s not a word that I would use). These words follow a previous rejection scene in which the smiling but callous issuer of visas tells a woman that Africa does not need immigrants with debt, and asks her to go cry somewhere else.

The persistent argument on the “patriotic” side is that the migrants do not meet Paradise’s needs, their *besoins*. Yet Yokossi depends upon the migrant *voyou* to spark animosity toward immigrants, first by paying him to kidnap Modibo’s niece, and then by paying him to instigate violence during the pro-integration demonstrations. The politicians in *Africa Paradis* do not invoke the shared needs of newly conceptualized humans, but the need for a class of laborers who will perform particular tasks, the perceived work of the “low” in a continent that divides labor according to race. Amoussou’s vision of a flawed future critiques a present system that views humans as racially divided units of labor. In this system, migrants must, as Mark Bould puts it, “reconcile [the] embodied self to the pace and demands of capital flows.”²⁹ Even the sympathetic, liberal Modibo seems oblivious to the needs of vulnerable people in distress: when asked for his comments on the devastation caused by a volcanic eruption in Africa, he sits at a distance, immersed in his drawing of a sketch of the French migrant Pauline, his sister Minata’s housemaid, with whom he has fallen in love. When pressed, Modibo takes a moment from his reverie to utter “Je suis contre” (I am against it). Modibo’s liberal view of migration follows a particular model that, as Dayna Oscherwitz describes it, posits “*intégration* as a process by which migrants make themselves acceptable to the dominant culture.”³⁰ Pauline, who becomes Modibo’s lover and is later allowed to stay, becomes this version of the integrated migrant.

It is doubtful that these scenes reflect what Sartre meant, in his reading of Fanon, when he speculated that the unfolding of the human will define itself as “the infinite unity of their mutual needs.”³¹ For Butler, “This vision of the infinite unity of mutual needs that might exist among the world’s inhabitants is one in which physical need and vulnerability would become matters for mutual recognition and regard.”³² In the future of *Africa Paradis*, political parties operate in a world in which humans are seen as units of labor, their bodies reduced to their capacity to work within circumscribed spaces. Bodily labor is accepted when there is a shortage, but the immigrant himself or herself is unwelcome, denied the rights of citizenship, and cast in discriminatory, criminalizing political discourses as a threat to national identity. This is not a fantasy world that Amoussou creates, but a world that reflects immigration politics in France and beyond.³³ Gendered divisions of labor in this “paradise” remain intact: Minata, who initially scoffs at the idea of a white maid living in her house, is told that if she does not accept Pauline as her housekeeper, then she will have to take care of the house. Pauline’s “mobility” in *Africa Paradis* is a move from housekeeper to nanny to lover. While the president of the United States of Africa is a woman, she does not assert her own views on migration; rather, she moderates the heated discussions between the assembly’s male representatives.

As Janis notes, the film’s “‘black paradise,’ or *paradis noir*, pivots on the homonym of *parodie*/parody.”³⁴ In this parody of an enclosed paradise, are there any signs of disenclosure, or future possibilities for new, open versions of subjectivity? Following Fanon and Jean-Luc Nancy, Achille Mbembe contemplates the politics of disenclosure in *Sortir de la grande nuit*.³⁵ As Axelle Karera states

in her reading of *Sortir*, disenclousure “designates the act of lifting of a fence, of removing either a temporal or spatial barrier that initially surrounded an enclosure.”³⁶ A subversion of the subject, a lifting of the fences that demarcate certain constructions of identity, might also be read as an act of disenclousure. Amoussou visualizes a spatial and temporal reconfiguration of global flows, and yet the physical borders remain, the policing of what Mbembe calls the *circulation des mondes* continues, and rhetorics of racialized power dominate. To twist a phrase from Mbembe’s *On the Postcolony*, *Africa Paradis* is an “imaginary realized.”³⁷ The imaginary that is “realized”—*realiser* in French means to direct a film—is not an African utopia, not a paradise (although certain versions of paradise are exclusive places with gates), but an Africa of new enclosures. The gate at the African embassy in France shuts out Europeans waiting in line; the “White City”—which evokes the French *banlieu*, or *cité*—is seen as a place apart. The film’s portrayal of an enclosed Africa is not only a reflection of Fortress Europe, but also a reflection on exclusionary currents on the African continent. As Karera laments, “In spite of its long history of migration and a progressively more cosmopolitan population, Africa is increasingly witnessing the proliferation of ideologies promoting radically dangerous indigenous politics. Indeed, from the 1994 Tutsi genocide in Rwanda, to the current Congolese tragedy, to the crisis in southern Sudan, race and ethnicity have undoubtedly become the measures by which who counts as a legitimate native is determined.”³⁸ Amoussou’s film, as it focuses on who must *sortir*, or exit, and who can stay, provides not just a speculative vision of a future, but a critique of a certain *vision* of a postcolonial future that maintain the politics of enclosure, and an exploration of where the politics of enclosure leads us. As Osinubi observes, science fiction films that postulate a near future do so not in order to “dramatise the immediacy of future risk but the already-existing selective nature of intimacy with contemporaneous risk.”³⁹ The film works against the version of decolonization that, as Karera puts it in her reading of *Sortir*, takes on “the shape of a mimetic exercise” in which “independence signifie[s] merely the reversal of relations of power and property.”⁴⁰ The imagined reversals of contemporary models of migration in *Africa Paradis* are invested in scrutinizing the present politics of enclosure and the future that such policies bear.

Jean-Pierre Bekolo’s book *Africa for the Future* starts with the pronouncement, “Au commencement, il y a toujours une histoire” (At the beginning, there is always a story).⁴¹ The stories, especially the stories of the elder woman of Bekolo’s village, place him within the cosmos.⁴² It is a placement that is embodied and communal, a physical voyage of interconnected bodies followed by a narrative that will “raconte l’histoire de l’Homme que la technologie sort de sa biologie” (tell the story of Man that technology takes from his biology), that will reinstate his physical being and open up his future action within the universe. The elder woman in the village teaches Bekolo that each time one begins a story with “Il était une fois” (Once upon a time), it will be possible to say, “Demain il sera une fois” (Tomorrow there will be a time).⁴³ The second part of Amoussou’s title—*Paradis*—invokes a fantasy, an illusion, an image of

some mysterious or unknown after, futurity, a “there will be a time.” As Wasif Diop’s music pipes in and out of the musical score, his lyrics, “Africa, Paradise,” already suggest an irony, something other than a utopian future, a place at a distant remove from utopia. Diop’s voice in Amoussou’s film addresses, mournfully and also sardonically, the ways in which Fanon’s insights have been eclipsed and rejected. It also critiques an imagined Europe sans African immigrants envisioned by *droitist* France that is not a utopia at all. This imagined future fantasy world misses the opportunity to rebuild human subjects joined in their precarity.

If there is a nod toward a re-rendering of unification in Amoussou’s film, it is suggested in the sisterhood sparked between Minata and Pauline. Initially, Minata’s treatment of Pauline is reminiscent of the ill treatment of the housekeeper Diouana in Ousmane Sembène’s 1965 *La Noire de . . .*, as Minata expects Pauline to respond immediately to the ringing of the bell and to obey her persistent, brusque commands. Minata assumes that a white person has nothing of value to say, and asserts that Pauline, because she is a white person, cannot be equal to an African. Yet after Pauline rescues Minata’s daughter from an attempted kidnapping, affection grows between the two, and they eventually ridicule their former hierarchical relationship. Minata and Pauline’s shared concern for the vulnerable daughter’s well-being is transcendent; it transforms their relationship from strangers to friends and then to family, with the possibility of a future in which they will be sisters-in-law. If Amoussou revisits the tragic bath scene in Sembène’s *La Noire de . . .*, in which Diouana, the target of hostile anti-immigrant racism, commits suicide, it is not a reversal but one moment of hope for dramatic change: Pauline soaps herself as Modibo comforts her.⁴⁴ Despite this possibility for change, at the end of the film thousands are expelled, and Yokossi becomes prime minister. When Yokossi declares, “Afrique ne peut pas nourir *tout les déshérité de la terre*” (Africa cannot feed the destitute of the Earth), there is an echo of Prime Minister Michel Rocard’s statement, in 1990, that France cannot welcome “la misère du monde” (the miserable of the Earth), and also a nod to Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*.⁴⁵ After the immigrants’ demonstrations are interrupted by the calculated violence of the police, Modibo’s “premature” integration bill is deferred. Change is postponed until the next time. The film concludes not with a human paradise but with mass deportation. In its conclusion, then, there is an implied critique of the deferral, or deportation, of our rehabilitation. The film invites scrutiny of the politics of enclosure as it poses open-ended questions of spectatorial subjectivity. For Butler, “the body in Fanon’s more future-minded prose is guided by the open question, a consciousness that is infinitely open.”⁴⁶ Fanon’s address to himself at the end of *Black Skin, White Masks*—“O my body, make of me always a man who questions!”—is for Butler “the most insurrectionary of his speech acts.”⁴⁷ In Amoussou’s film, speculation itself—reimagined global flows, the open question of the subject, the possibilities of address, the delegation of speculative voices, and the question “what if”—activate a project for novel conceptions of humanity that are deliberately speculative.

Notes

1. Michael Janis, "The United States of Africa: Afrofuturistic Pasts and Afropolitan Futures," *Journal of African Cinemas* 5, no. 1 (2013): 35.
2. Taiwo Adetunji Osinubi, "Cognition's Warp: African Films on Near-Future Risk," *African Identities* 7, no. 2 (2009): 256.
3. See Alec G. Hargreaves, *Multi-Ethnic France: Immigration, Politics, Culture, and Society*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 9.
4. See Dominic Thomas, *Africa and France: Postcolonial Cultures, Migration, and Racism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 66–70.
5. *Ibid.*, 68–70; emphasis in the original.
6. *Ibid.*, 80–81.
7. Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 239.
8. Janis, "The United States of Africa," 40.
9. Laurel Bollinger, "Placental Economy: Octavia Butler, Luce Irigaray, and Speculative Subjectivity," *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory* 18, no. 4 (2007): 325.
10. Quoted in James Patrick Kelley, "Slipstream," in *Speculations on Speculation: Theories of Science Fiction*, ed. James Gunn and Matthew Candelaria (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 343.
11. Darko Suvin, "Estrangement and Cognition," in *Speculations on Speculation: Theories of Science Fiction*, ed. James Gunn and Matthew Candelaria (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 25–26.
12. *Ibid.*, 26.
13. Judith Butler, *Senses of the Subject* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 192.
14. *Ibid.*, 193.
15. *Ibid.*, 188.
16. *Ibid.*, 190.
17. From the poem "Harlem," by Langston Hughes, which begins with the line, "What happens to a dream deferred?"
18. Thomas, *Africa and France*, 76.
19. For more on the *droitisation* of French politics, see Hargreaves, *Multi-Ethnic France*, and Thomas, *Africa and France*.
20. Quoted in Butler, *Senses of the Subject*, 212.
21. *Ibid.*, 173–74.
22. *Ibid.*, 174.
23. The phrase "delegation of voices" was initially inspired by Robert Stam's discussion of the "delegation of voice." Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 279. Stam builds on Kobena Mercer and Isaac Julien's use of the term, which they attribute to Paul Gilroy. Kobena Mercer and Isaac Julien, "Introduction: De Margin and De Center," *Screen* 29, no. 4 (1988): 3–10.

24. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), xviii.

25. I take the words “transcendent” and “indeterminate” from Cajetan Iheka’s comments on an earlier version of this chapter. I extend many thanks to Cajetan for his thoughtful engagement with my arguments.

26. Butler, *Senses of the Subject*, 191.

27. Hargreaves, *Multi-Ethnic France*, 140.

28. Butler, *Senses of the Subject*, 196.

29. Mark Bould, *Science Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2012), 183.

30. Dayna Oscherwitz, *Past Forward: French Cinema and the Post-Colonial Heritage* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010), 101.

31. Quoted in Butler, *Senses of the Subject*, 189.

32. *Ibid.*

33. See Hargreaves, *Multi-Ethnic France*, 140–64.

34. Janis, “The United States of Africa,” 34.

35. As both Axelle Karera and Michael Syrotinski observe, Mbembe appears to borrow the term “dis-enclosure” from Jean-Luc Nancy’s *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*, trans. Bettina Bergo, Gabriel Malenfant, and Michael B. Smith (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008; French version, 2005). Axelle Karera, “Review Articles: Writing Africa into the World and Writing the World from Africa: Mbembe’s Politics of Dis-Enclosure,” *Critical Philosophy of Race* 1, no. 2 (2013): 228–41; Michael Syrotinski, “‘Genealogical Misfortunes’: Achille Mbembe’s (Re-)Writing of Postcolonial Africa,” *Paragraph* 35, no. 3 (2012): 407–20.

36. Karera, “Review Articles: Writing Africa,” 232–33.

37. Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 242.

38. Karera, “Review Articles: Writing Africa,” 236.

39. Osinubi, “Cognition’s Warp,” 259.

40. Karera, “Review Articles: Writing Africa,” 238.

41. Jean-Pierre Bekolo, *Africa for the Future. Sortir un nouveau monde du cinéma* (Yaounde: Collection Mondes en Mouvement—Cinema, Dagan & MedYa, 2009), 13.

42. *Ibid.*, 15–16.

43. *Ibid.*, 16.

44. For a more elaborate comparison between *Africa Paradis* and *La Noire de . . .*, see Osinubi, “Cognition’s Warp.”

45. Michel Rocard’s statement is quoted in Thomas, *Africa and France*, 67.

46. Butler, *Senses of the Subject*, 193.

47. *Ibid.*, 194.

Part Four

Migration and Difference

Indigeneity, Race, Religion,
and Poetry at the Margins

Monkeys from Hell, Toubabs in Africa

Kenneth W. Harrow

The Autochthonous

There are two critical pieces to retain while reading *Doomi Golo*, *The Hidden Diaries* by Boubacar Boris Diop: the condition of Africans who have migrated to Europe, and the Rwandan genocide of 1994, which served as the occasion for Diop's novel *Murambi: The Book of Bones*. Bones, genocide, and the horror stories of what migrants have had to endure are not very far from much of what transpires in this novel. The "Hidden Diaries" of the title are ostensibly the notebooks written by Nguirane, an elderly grandfather living in the quartier of Niarela in Dakar. He is writing to Badou, his grandson, who has migrated to Europe, following the path of his father Assane Tall.

The novel opens with Nguirane receiving the news that his son Assane has died in Marseilles, and that his widow and two children will be returning for the burial. As Assane's departure had entailed leaving Badou's mother, Bigué Samb, Badou shuns his father's funeral, and shortly thereafter heads to France himself. Eventually he ceases to write home and is lost from sight. His fate, like his life abroad, is recounted via the rumor mill, as those back home live only in the uncertainty of the fate of those who have crossed over into Europe. "In Niarela they say nobody knows where he is, nor whether he is still alive. *However*, says a reporter, *according to reliable sources, Alioune Badara Tall, alias Badou, has drowned near Arrecife on the island of Lanzarote in the Canaries when a boat full of illegal migrants capsized*. I know the evil tongue that leaks these rumours to the journalist."¹ This dire rumor follows the initial references to Badou, who had been seen as abandoning his beloved grandfather and quartier. Rumor, loss, pain—the migrants' story recapitulated from father to son:

And now there are those who claim you have travelled east. Rumour has it that you are in Algeria, in Morocco, or perhaps even further away—in

Lebanon. Everybody here is dreaming up places where you may be living in exile, without rhyme or reason. The other day, one of them actually had the audacity to say:

“Mark my words, everybody! Badou Tall has answered the call of the blood. We all know blood is thicker than water. Sooner or later, someone will come and tell us he has seen this boy in France. Badou has followed in the footsteps of his father Assane Tall who passed away in Marseilles! And on the day when we hear this news, don’t forget that I was the one who said it first!”²

Nguirane waits in vain for word from his grandson. The fate of his son was communicated by a woman he did not know, and who proves to be all one might fear for a son who has gone abroad. His grandson out of touch, rumored to be dead, Nguirane writes in a void, after having received back home the widow of his son and their two children. All is loss for those who wait, living in uncertainty and hope, slowly learning that there is no message that will provide answers to their fears. There are children, *doomi*, but not truth or some revelation that will provide a clear vision or understanding of what happened, or what they had encountered in Europe. This is the novel of those who stayed behind.

Doomi Golo

Who are the monkeys of the title (*Doomi Golo* means The children of the monkey), those who are “not quite”? Specifically the title refers to Assane’s children whom he had fathered with Yacine in France. But Diop’s play on the shocking trope of the African children as monkeys encompasses transfigurations and reversals that cannot be accommodated by realist readings. Truth for Diop is at a double remove when trying to access it in the Other’s language. For this novel written in Wolof, the presentation of *golo*, the monkey’s mother, cannot be confined to the European’s racist aspersions. *Golo*, for Wolof culture, conveys slyness, greediness, antisocial trickster tropes. How could the grandfather who remained at home come to terms with his own “bouts de bois de dieu”—the pieces of God’s wood who are one’s children—who arrive back from France, bearing all the arrogance and indifference of the spoiled expatriate, uninitiated, and privileged?

At one point they are described as neither here nor there (“People don’t turn into monkeys or butterflies or whatever, just like that!”³)—in French one would say, “ni chèvre ni chou” (neither goat nor cabbage)—as though liberating them from the burdens of being French or African (of being a Boris or a Boubacar). But the names are misleading. In the novel they are clearly identified as Mbissane and Mbissine, or Ninki-Nanka.⁴

The children are mixed, like those who are of mixed race or mixed origins—mixed beings. Their nickname, Ninki-Nanka, suggests they are like

dragons, fearful mixtures with different parts. Toure Kounda sings of Ninka and Nanka in his album *Casamance au clair de lune*. According to the blog CFZ, Chinese dragons might have been sighted in the Gambia. According to the BBC report, “it is described as having a horse-like face, a long body with mirror-like scales and a crest of skin on its head.” The expedition leader, Richard Freeman, continued with his report of the beast and its sightings: “Team leader Richard Freeman told the BBC, evidence so far was sketchy as most people died soon after seeing it. Mr. Freeman, a cryptozoologist from the UK-based Centre for Fortean Zoology [CFZ], admitted that the ninki-nanka’s existence was ‘very far-fetched indeed.’ Second-hand accounts varied wildly from it looking like a crocodile or a snake to having wings and spitting fire, he said.”⁵

Had Mr. Freeman read *Doomi Golo* he would have had a clearer notion of the monster they were seeking. The lines between Ninka and Nanka might have been imaginary, like all claims to autochthony, but also might have been as deadly as those between Hutu and Tutsi, where at Murambi in 1994 a massacre occurred and where subsequently a memorial was constructed. Moved by what he found there, Diop wrote *Murambi: The Book of Bones*, whose protagonist had fled the killings, and returned to Rwanda to find himself implicated. In her review of the novel, Jennie Burnet writes:

Diop’s tale centers on the experiences of Cornelius Uvimana, a Rwandan history teacher living in Djibouti at the time of the genocide. Uvimana returns home in 1998 (the same time as Diop’s visit to Rwanda) to come face-to-face with the horrible truth that his mother and siblings had died in 1994 at a school, along with thousands of others, where his father had organized the massacre. During his visit, Uvimana faces simultaneously the painful loss of his mother and siblings, and the shame of being the son of a particularly infamous perpetrator.⁶

In *Doomi Golo*, Diop writes of another return—one also marked by death and shame. The monkey-mother of Mbissane and Mbissine is Yacine Ndiaye, a streetwalker from Marseille who met Assane Tall, the handsome, talented Senegalese footballer, and stole him away from his French mistress. He had left behind in Dakar his Senegalese wife Bigué Samb and their child Badou. When Assane died, Yacine had his father Nguirane repatriate the body, and she then returned to Dakar for the funeral. After that she stayed on, living in Nguirane’s house, transplanting herself and her arrogant children into the family compound as if she were herself the owner of the house, the original inhabitant, the mistress of God’s bits of wood.⁷ For the people of the quartier, she is the allogene, the outsider:

“The foreign lady.”

“Ugly as a she-monkey. Makes me wonder how Assane Tall could have married her.”⁸

Every moment in this story returns us to the basic structures of the question of autochthony in Africa. When race is evoked, no matter how extravagant the issue appears, in the end the foreign figure returns us to the binary of the “owners of the house” and the “outsiders.” Awoonor’s famous poem “The Weaver Bird” gave us the images that have recurred many times over the years, including the original response to the colonizers, the whites, the *toubabs*, like the weaver bird who came into the original bird’s house and pushed out the original owners.⁹

“The Weaver Bird”

The weaver bird built in our house
 And laid its eggs on our only tree.
 We did not want to send it away.
 We watched the building of the nest
 And supervised the egg-laying.
 And the weaver returned in the guise of the owner.
 Preaching salvation to us that owned the house.¹⁰

The weaver bird, or sometimes the cowbird, which lays its eggs in another bird’s nest, is also the figure for the white man, the colonizer. Toubabs in West Africa are whites or those who inhabit the roles of whites. Of course with time, the term evolved, but generally a toubab would be a white colonialist—a “European,” meaning a white person, or sometimes just a French person. *Toubab* became the term for those whose roles in society—whose mannerisms, speech, and education—marked them off as belonging to white society. Originally denoting the ruling class of colonialists, over time and with independence it became associated with whites and their roles in a neocolonial frame.

If in Africa the outsider might be the toubab, in Europe the immigrant is the *allogène*—the refugee, the African. Each culture defines autochthony contextually, and the concept is subject to the pressures of belonging or exclusion. Each, in fact, needs the Other in order to qualify as the indigenous one. But within each community, each house, there are also those who belong and those who have left to become someone else. Peter Geschiere describes in some detail, in *The Perils of Belonging*, how the inhabitants of East Cameroon radically changed their notions of belonging once the new neoliberal policies of remunerating local communities for the harvesting of lumber were instituted. As local communities began to receive a significant share of the payments for trees harvested within their jurisdiction, it became crucial to define who was actually autochthonous. With the corrupt economic order marking Cameroon’s politics for decades, there had been no incentive for locals to remain in the village rather than move to the cities. The mass migration turned locals into foreigners. They had few incentives to return, were treated often as outsiders, and even ran risks of incurring the displeasure of the “owners of the house” were they to return with inadequate gifts.

Geschiere details how home can be perilous for those who forgot their obligations and inadequately recompensed the demands of those who remained behind. The needs of family imposed obligations on those who become *toubabs* in Douala or Yaounde. If they neglected the home front, there would be reminders that might take the form of some unexpected illness.¹¹ In Loreau's *Les noms n'habitent nulle part* (Names don't live anywhere, 1994), the wayward Sekou who has fallen in love with a white Belgian woman has to be called home to Senegal by the magic of his Peul relatives. His umbilical cord is buried at home, where his wife and children also await him. When he left, did they know he would have to be called home, and that magic would be needed?

In *Witchcraft, Intimacy and Trust* Geschiere tells us that as we form intimate relations with family and neighbors, we expect a secure nest or a secure home, warmth, protection, that will enable us to counter the threats beyond the home and compound. However, "The seeds of destruction are hidden inside social relations as such, even though these are vital for any human undertaking."¹² When Geschiere quotes his Maka informants about witchcraft—what they call *djembe*, they inform him that the most dangerous kind is *djembe le ndjaw*, "witchcraft from inside the house."¹³ The Nigerian writer and critic Pius Adesanmi tells me there is a Yoruba proverb that states that danger to be feared lies outside the compound, but the worse dangers come from within. "Ehinkule ni ota wa, inu ile ni aseni ngbe" (Your enemy is outside the fence/house but your real/worst enemy is inside the house/fence and living with you).¹⁴

Remissions constitute the greatest source of income for many nations in Africa. Intimacy, as Geschiere has put it, has gone global, and the greater the distance, the greater the call not to forget where you came from. Geschiere states that the witchcraft of the home, the witchcraft of the family, has now grafted itself onto the forms of global mobility, so that whereas in the past witches were thought to travel by turning into owls or other birds who flew at night, now witches can travel via airplanes, cell phones, and the like—with electronic calls, carrying magic for good or evil, like 419 messages, flying over all the great walls of Euro-American fortresses, invading our most intimate spaces. Witches at a distance are now as close as your skin, in the new global family where, if it takes a village to raise a child, that same village can bring that child back, or down.¹⁵

Bearing this in mind, we can now consider Yacine's role in Nguirane's compound. On the one hand, as his son's wife, she is both the outsider who has come into the family circle as well as a legitimate member of the family. There is no word for the one who straddles this outsider-insider position, so in a sense it becomes a question of what she makes of the possibilities offered by her marriage. Yacine's response to the patriarch's objections to her children's behavior, as when Mbissine urinates on Nguirane's prayer mat in rebellion against his grandfather's authority, informs the rest of the novel by its violence. It is a gesture of genocidal proportions because it kills not only the patriarch's authority, but the grounding for the family, which depends upon the relationships Nguirane attempts to forge with his children, his grandchildren, and his extended family members.¹⁶ Nguirane recounts his trauma at Yacine's humiliating act:

Despite the fact that no one found out about it, and there was no shouting and screaming or anything like that, what happened next was simply awful:

Without raising her voice, Yacine Ndiaye told me straight to my face:

“How dare you speak to me like this, Nguirane Faye? Are you trying to give me orders, me, Yacine Ndiaye? Take a look at this . . . Yes, open your eyes wide, Nguirane Faye, and see what I have to show you.”

I looked at her. Nothing could have prepared me for what she had in store for me. She was standing in front of me, with her legs spread apart, and her loincloth open. Her index finger was pointing at her vagina, and in her usual icy, provocative tone of voice, she said:

“Can you see this, Nguirane Faye? Can you see it clearly? It’s mine and I offer it to anybody I like.”

That day, my ears heard forbidden words and my eyes saw what they should never have had to see: the courtyard of the house suddenly became pitch-black. I implored God to pardon me, because such things only happen to those who have deeply offended Him in some way. I was convinced my last hour had come.

When I regained consciousness, the whole of Niarela had gathered around me.¹⁷

Nguirane can no longer be the center of the universe in his role as patriarch, and for Boris Diop, his role as head of the household is not based on the fact of his gender and its implications of greater strength—in fact he shows himself as cautious, if not weak, when Ali Kaboye is being attacked by the dictator’s goons—but on the ordering of his universe that turns on the relationship of home and the world, the private and the public domains. Most of all, the domains’ security rests upon the assurances derived from one’s origins—from the ancestor and the ancestral home. The Rwandan genocide had been marked by atrocities that occurred in the sanctuaries of church and school—like those at Murambi.¹⁸ The Rwandan government vowed that never again would they occur and erected memorials where the skulls and bones of the victims were placed on display. Ancestors’ bones are mixed with those of other victims, like reliquary bones magically retooled to ward off future genocides.

Nguirane writes to Badou, his grandson who had left for the North, and has not been heard from, even after his father’s death in Marseilles. Badou is invisible, and for Nguirane, it is as though he won’t return to their lives until Nguirane himself can journey back to his own roots where ancestry and the foundations of home can be grounded. The drama of Yacine and her two monkey-children is framed by the story of returning home, for both grandson and grandfather, and this Nguirane undertakes directly after Yacine’s disgraceful action.

In Geschiere’s account of autochthony, he describes how it became necessary to prove one’s belonging to gain the rights to the vast sums of money coming into the local east Cameroonian forest communities from the harvesting of lumber. The same applies elsewhere for voting: the Cameroonian government

had learned to manipulate the voting protocols, requiring “nonindigenous” members of major cities who typically voted against Biya to return to “their” villages to vote. However, what constitutes a native village for those who have left for more than one generation? The solution—the trick, in fact—is to require all voters to return to the location where their ancestors have been buried, since it is there where one rejoins the ancestors in the ground, there where the patriarch is buried, that one’s homeland is constituted.¹⁹

The underlying politics are masqueraded and displaced onto disputes over “authentic belonging,” autochthony, self-being grounded in the chthonous, the earth, with the spirits of the earth embodied in one’s ancestors. How astonishing for a regime driven by the modernity of democracy—the ideology of neoliberalism that also underlies the politics of monetary redistribution for the exploitation of natural resources—that ancestral ties (earth, blood, name, tribe) should have returned from the graves of colonial modernity to permit autocratic regimes to manipulate elections. Cameroon has known only two presidents since independence—even before independence since the French appointed Ahidjo in 1958. But even in locations where the regimes have been more recently seated, like Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the processes of manipulating voting have become pervasive.

Home for the migrant, as Geschiere has stressed, is a place of ambivalences. When the migrants arrive abroad, they bear enormous burdens of expectation. The family forges the first lines of dependency; the first obligations are to the family. The first ties of love, but also need, are framed around the family. The child for whom sacrifices were made, so that she might receive an education, was expected to enable the parents to count on support in their old age. The distance of the state social safety net in countries that have relatively meager resources reinforces this dependency on the family. The child who leaves will always remain tied to home. This is the fundamental credo and the less it remains actually true, as the child’s education takes him away to the university in the capital, and as she finds jobs in the city or maybe abroad, the more the unshakeable confidence in the credo begins to unravel. The student, now away, might meet someone who converses in a language different from that of their parents, and how would the grandparents be able to speak with their grandchildren if that union to Another were forged?

When Camara Laye wrote about the secrets of his initiation in *L’enfant noir*, he lamented, do we have any secrets any more, meaning any more secrets to be betrayed? The ties that David Diop apotheosized in his famous poem “Africa” were already little more than an idealization when he penned them in 1956:

Africa my Africa
Africa of proud warriors in ancestral savannahs
Africa of whom my grandmother sings
On the banks of the distant river
I have never known you
But your blood flows in my veins.²⁰

When Boris Diop evokes the ideals of Cheikh Anta Diop, he is framing the call of the ancestors,²¹ the Africa of David Diop's grandmother, in terms of *Coups de Pilon's* negritude appeal. But the interlocutors, Nguirane's grandchildren, can no longer hear the grandmother's song "on the banks of the distant river." Something has been lost, stolen, or destroyed. If Boris Diop were to launch his grandfatherly figure of Nguirane on the quest of that loss, it would seem to be in a universe in which much has been reversed. Not only does the returning daughter-in-law Yacine Ndiaye undo the patriarch's world, but the foundations upon which the authentic Africa with its proud warriors rely have to be recalibrated by the fact that it was the son, Assane, who died before his father Nguirane, and whose return home was not in payment of an obligation, but rather created the obligation to pay the costs of repatriation and burial that Yacine insisted Nguirane had to assume. The grandchildren she brings back with her urinate on Nguirane's sacred values, on his prayer mat, and his objections are met with scorn and bring humiliation. Badou is lost, the world would seem to have become the very thing David Diop was attempting to counter in his idealizing of an Africa of the ancestors—a world in which the witchcraft of the home had lost its powers.

This is brought home to us in the scene in which Nguirane sets out to find the tomb of his ancestor. Again, to frame his journey we must take note of the evocation of death from the outset. The first notebook is titled "The Tale of the Ashes," and it begins with Nguirane's reflections on burials: "For generations, the farewell ritual in our family has remained the same: one by one, we enter the room where the dearly departed has been laid out on a mat, and there we each say our silent prayers for the peace of his soul."²² However, Badou refuses to attend his father's burial, and shortly thereafter leaves for Marseilles, only to disappear into the darkness of La France. Nguirane can write to him in his notebooks only as an imagined presence, and the writing, like the story, is framed by death and dreams:

Now I am old and quietly waiting for the end, right here in the courtyard of our house in this part of Niarela you know so well.

I'm not in perfect health, that I know—and how could I be at the age of nearly eighty?—but I am pleased to say that so far at least, my body is not a total wreck. I certainly don't relish the thought of becoming completely decrepit.

And you, Badou, the child of my deceased son, are now the focus of my life.

Sometimes I close my eyes, trying to guess at least the name of the country where you are living now. But I always give up very quickly. It's so frustrating not even to have a vague idea. . . .²³

The unknown location becomes a preoccupation, calling our attention to the migrant's invisibility, distance, and loss: "And now there are those who claim you have travelled east. Rumour has it that you are in Algeria, in Morocco,

or perhaps even further away—in Lebanon. Everybody here is dreaming up places where you may be living in exile, without rhyme or reason.”²⁴

The writing becomes Nguirane’s compensation for the double loss of his son and his grandson,²⁵ and as the novel proceeds, as he finally comes to give the account of the monkey’s children, it will be in the narrative itself that whatever power obtains in the ancestor’s dreams will be recovered. The loss might be seen as that which negritude incurred in its combat against the colonial world; it is doubled with the postcolonial loss of the talented football-playing son Assane when he abandoned his original Dakarais sweetheart and wife Bigué Samb and their son Badou. The notebooks replace the losses, and function in part as the ghost limb in traumatic loss, an absent-presence, felt most in the loss:

And if there is one thing no one has even the slightest doubt about in Niarela, it is that one day, sooner or later, you will come back here to take your rightful place among us.

I, alas, shall no longer be on this earth by then. The thought that we will never see each other again is very hard for me to bear, I can’t deny it. That is the reason why, for some time now, I have been talking to you so much through my *Notebooks*. Everything I write there is addressed to you.²⁶

Toubabs in Africa

“She and her two children consider themselves as strangers in Niarela and it’s obvious that to them, this is not their country. I don’t believe they are trying to behave like *Toubabs* on purpose. It comes quite naturally to them.”²⁷ “Ah, our two little *Toubabs!*”²⁸ *Toubabs* are white people, but what kind of white people? And, following Nguirane’s itinerary, we might ask, what does it mean to be a white person? Yacine Ndiaye is Senegalese, so when Nguirane first speaks to her on the phone, when she is calling to inform him that Assane died, that she is his wife, and that he, Nguirane would have to pay quickly for the repatriation of the body, Nguirane’s first impulse is to ask her who her people were so that he could properly situate her in his world. But when Yacine returns, and the community begins to comment on her, it isn’t her genealogy or family that defines her belonging, not the bones of her ancestors, but her otherness, like a toubab and a half, more than a normal amount:

“That’s her,” says somebody.

“You’re right.”

“The foreign lady.”

“Ugly as a she-monkey. Makes me wonder how Assane Tall could have married her.”²⁹

The comments on her mores condemning her behavior convey the conservatism of the patriarchal Senegalese code. *Toubab* here conveys immorality, indecency:

“Do you actually believe it? That they were married, I mean?”

“They were living together under the same roof.”

“That means they were living in sin.”

“Yes, the kind of sin God never forgives!” another one adds triumphantly.³⁰

The community comes together by its common acceptance of a border that encloses its members: it cannot do this without excluding others, without defining them as other and expelling them.

“Do you know what Wolof Njaay used to say?”

“*A Toubab in a black skin is always a Toubab and a half. . .*”

“I think Wolof Njaay is right, as always!”

Yacine Ndiaye all on her own could be described as a foreign invading army, while Niarela is a small defenceless country.³¹

What happens when the toubab turns out to be oneself, or someone living in one’s home? Diop plays with this by doubling back and forth between identity claims in which are asserted the traditional prerogatives of the land, blood, and ancestor, and then the magical, the spiritual, or the unreal where those prerogatives are undone. The interplay between these two registers lies between the real and the unreal, between the call of the ancestors and the whistling of the wind; where a Cheshire cat’s grin, or the domain of the spirits evokes a power vested in the soul of Africa, one that might engage us only to perplex the terms of engagement.

We learn about Nguirane through his address to Badou. But though it is Badou who appears lost, the real question is not where he can be located, but what we learn about Nguirane in his attempts to find the way to address Badou. Nguirane is the center, the home base, where the resistance to the toubab is located. But his house is invaded by the “foreign invading army” led by the she-monkey and her children, the *doomi golo*. If the one “bout de bois de dieu,” Badou, the invaluable grandchild, is lost, still the struggle that ensues after Yacine has returned with the body of Assane can be seen, perversely, counterintuitively, as being over the two wretched children Yacine dragged back with her. Either they will be lost permanently or Nguirane will triumph over the toubab-woman-she-monkey and turn the children into real black Africans. This lies at the heart of the catachresis that entraps the original David Diop figuration of negritude, of the real quartier Niarela,³² the “real” African voice, with the use of Wolof to write this novel—in short, the authenticity of this African novel, which can reverse the colonial and postcolonial transformation of the African into the toubab, and transform the migrant into a newly transplanted toubab.

Yacine must turn white, literally, as the impossible figure of a loss needed to pay for the recuperation of her children, her monkey-children, back into real God's bits of wood.

Two major episodes will serve to evoke this process. The first is in the grandfather's return to his original village, and the last is Yacine being duped and seduced into losing her children.

In place of the son's return, the conventional trajectory David Diop had imagined for his own restoration after the loss of becoming a Frenchman in France, in place of Assane's return as a corpse or Badou's disappearance, Nguirane sets out for Mbering-Saaj to the tomb of his ancestor, so as to reestablish his world and to recover from the sight of his daughter-in-law's vagina. The links between life and death are drawn as filiations that connect the bones of those who are gone, passing through Nguirane's notebooks to his children and grandchildren, who are at risk of being lost. The losses are haunted by death.

What launches Nguirane was not a cat's grin, but its call, at the moment when Nguirane's closeness to Badou was being evoked by Lamine. This is what leads Nguirane to pose the question of identity that subtends the search for Badou. Lamine's comments put Badou in the forefront of Nguirane's reflections, setting the stage for the appearance of the cat:

"If you, old Nguirane, don't know where Badou is right now, then who can? You were everything to him."

"Badou was everything to me, too," I said.

Then Lamine left, and all was quiet again in the courtyard.³³

The transition to the unknown then is presented as a purely physical experience, occurring "as sometimes happens, inexplicably."

As sometimes happens, inexplicably, I felt I was being watched. For several minutes already, there was this strong physical sensation somewhere in the nape of my neck. When I looked up, there was a cat sitting on top of the wall that surrounds the compound. We looked at each other. The glint in its eyes suddenly made everything seem unreal and vaguely unsettling. Without taking its gaze off me, the cat meowed, first once, and then again, before taking a supple leap and vanishing into the neighboring courtyard.³⁴

We have no reason to suspect this cat is anything but a cat, rather than a messenger. Its physical behavior is not presented as extraordinary, as anything other than what it appears to be. The suggestion of its consciousness, its agency, is gleaned from its eyes, the "glint" that "suddenly made everything seem unreal."

Everything shifts with this event. "Reality" joins together the agent, the understanding of action and world; the cat's glint shifts this conjuncture to disjuncture. Nguirane, old, settled, and the novel's secure base for the

African, becomes unmoored, like the toubab himself in Africa—the one who does not belong. He thinks: “*Your name is Nguirane Faye. But who are you really, you, the man by the name Nguirane Faye? Don’t you think that by now, close to the end of your life, you should at least be able to state clearly who you are?*”³⁵ Why should he have been led to this reflection? And further, following this disconcerting moment, he suddenly remembers, “for no obvious reason,”³⁶ the night Badou fell ill, when he and Bigué Samb had to trek through the city to the hospital. The doctor told them that had they not come in just then, Badou would have died. The reflection on this memory returns us from Nguirane’s question of who he is to the uncertain moment of unreality created by the encounter with the cat:

“[The doctor] sounded terribly aloof when he said: ‘If you hadn’t brought this boy now, he would have been dead by sunrise.’

Another meowing.

I turned round and looked at the wall again, but the cat was gone. Where could it possibly be?³⁷

Nguirane remembers his mother fleeing from Mbering-Saaj, remembers ending up in Niarela, remembers his job working for the Air Liquide factory, calls up his father’s name Dibocor Faye, and tells us the color of his skin is “on the light side,” and tells us of his height and his good posture despite his age. With this he is able to locate himself at the center of his subjectivity, constructed out of the memories and insignificant details, so as to hold the real world together: “Yes, all these small, seemingly insignificant details make up a human life, and they have helped me find my bearings here on earth.”³⁸ The ordering of these features constitutes his universe, and yet they cannot hold without the subject, the center, to which is to be affixed his name, his “identity,” his consciousness, to which Badou and the monkey-children must be attached. He is Nguirane Faye, an old man, respected by his family and community, but he might as well be a toubab for all that this means. His name, his life, like the skulls in the memorials to the genocide in Rwanda, represent and evoke pure loss. Diop’s African here is still asking, who am I?

I am saying all this in the full knowledge that it’s not the correct answer to such a seemingly straightforward question: *Your name is Nguirane Faye, but who are you?* After so many lost battles and faded hopes, here I am now, at the mercy of the passage of time, like a hollow gourd swept away by the waves. You will understand when you read my *Notebooks* that mine was not what one would call a happy and fulfilling life. I have spent years literally just staggering around in the dark. No doubt it would have been better if I had steered clear of all those dreams and grandiose ideas. To spell out the brutal truth: my social status is nil, and not a single soul remembers me now.³⁹

Nguirane's journey back to the past, to Mbering-Saaj, proves utterly catastrophic. He discovers that his ancestor was a monster, that there is no grave to which he could return to pay homage or to reconnect his life. He tells Badou that his brave journey back in time is necessary ("And yet, sooner or later, every single one of us must set off and revisit his most distant past, asking himself when this whole story *really* started for him, and by that I mean his life among the rest of humanity. Just resigning ourselves to our ignorance about these things is just like dying before even having been born. But he who is courageous enough to travel back in time will eventually find who he was looking for: his deceased ancestors."⁴⁰). But instead of finding deceased ancestors, his journey leads us to absence and, more importantly, to the reversion into a universe ruled by the unsightly, unsocial, inhuman figures, like monkeys. Nguirane learns from the old spirit men of Mbering-Saaj who his true ancestor, Mame Ngor, really was: someone who did not belong there.

First of all, Mame Ngor didn't even belong here. Like a lost soul, he just arrived here one day from Ndiorène, the land of his birth. He was chased away from there because he'd been presumptuous enough to think he would be able to turn the minds of the people in Ndiorène inside out. But after spending a long time listening to his prophecies without having even the slightest idea what he was talking about, his relatives down there quite simply told him: "Mame Ngor, leave us in peace, please, and go somewhere far away from here."⁴¹

He learned of his ancestor's follies, prophecies, and oppressive nature. He learned of the hatred he had engendered, of the scorn heaped on him. The spirit-men tell him, "Mame Ngor was a stubborn man, clearly unable to let go of his *idée fixe*. 'Your Ancestor is a fool.'"⁴²

Nguirane's return turns into a nightmare. The inhabitants of Mbering-Saaj increasingly appear as spirit beings inhabiting a region in which Nguirane had no rights to claim autochthonous origins. The bones of his ancestor are no longer available, and he has to return home to write of his failure to Badou. The history of the family could not begin with the past, but with the future: "'The grave I searched for in vain in Mbering-Saaj is somewhere else. When you are back in Niarela, I want you to go and find the place where the ancestor was laid to rest. That will be the starting point of our family-history.'"⁴³

Nguirane learns that the spiritual direction of time is circular, so that he cannot find himself in the past: "'Don't get me wrong. Remember that time is circular and that the ancestor is not yet born. It's you yourself who have to give birth to him.'"

The monkey-children, the "two little toubabs," the "foreigners," situate Nguirane in the present where they remain outsiders and he, lost to the ancestors, appears incapable of bringing them home. Immediately on his return from Mbering-Saaj, the transition from the unreality to the presentness of the funeral returns us to his preoccupation with the two little "toubab"

monkey-children. If he can't control them, if they refuse to behave as proper children of Niarela, he must worry that they will disrupt the funeral, indeed the whole social order of the community. Ngoné tells him: "These two little *Toubabs!* Their presence in Niarela is not a good omen! I, Ngoné Thioune, am telling you right now that this story is bound to end badly!"⁴⁴

Nguirane writes to Badou that it is Friday, the holy day, the day of his father's funeral. But instead of turning his attention to the internment of Assane, it is the children's behavior that preoccupies him.

But in reality I am mainly concerned about Mbissane and his sister Mbissine, the two children Yacine Ndiaye brought back with her from Marseille. They simply don't fit in with the other children in Niarela. They do everything differently, and I am worried they might misbehave towards the many mourners who will be at the funeral. No matter where they go, I will never let Mbissine and Mbissane out of my sight, ready to intervene the moment they put a foot wrong.⁴⁵

Nguirane proceeds to recount to Badou a "little fiction," and not the account of his father's funeral. In what follows he creates an alter ego for himself named Atou Seck, an older man who sees the world around him collapse into corruption and violence. The unreality of the dystopic vision has a counterpart in the real world in which a polemic against Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade and the ugliness of his neoliberal order is allegorized. Within the larger African universe toward which the dystopia gestures the anomy is linked to child soldiers, and a landscape of those reduced to bare life and the state of exception. In a "civilized" order, we infer, fully human beings would not be considered or treated as animals, or treated/labeled as monkeys, savages, or uncultured. Diop reaches for the fullest state of horror, as in Kurtz's imagination, when he describes Atou Seck's eventual decline in his hometown where all the inhabitants have fled from the war. As Atou Seck attempts to survive on his own, he encounters the malefic figure of the mother-monkey who leaves him her two children, the *doomi golo*. The invasion of the town becomes imminent, and Atou Seck is taken captive by two monkey-children who tie him up, take possession of the house, the food, the television, and reduce him to the status of their pet.

This long episode echoes the reversals Nguirane meets on his journey back to Mbering-Saaj, where his ancestor's grave is missing, and the memories of his life there were so reprehensible. These episodes prefigure the ending of the novel when the monkey-mother Yacine is undone by the sorcerer's magic in granting her wish and transforming her into a white woman, thus tricking her out of her children. The bizarre features of these reversals and allegories all derive from the original ancestral betrayal, the one hidden from view in David Diop's poem "Africa," the quintessential poem of exaltation of the missing homeland, forged in the face of toubabs' assumptions of "civilization" that accounted for the invention of Africa as the land of monkeys. Nguirane remembers those times and his failed attempts at resistance:

You should have seen us on our way into the city centre after the prayer of *tisbaar*. I am talking about a time, Badou, when the horse-drawn carriage was a means of transport reserved for the privileged few. Picture them looking down on us from their seats up there, like royalty, while we, the riffraff, were having to walk along behind, or next to, the horses, forming a kind of guard-of-honour for those fake Whites, without even being aware of it. I still see them in my mind's eye, my *évolués*: shipping clerks, bookkeepers, the black elite, if you like. They used to go to work in a jacket and tie, wearing a pith helmet. Some of them would recite verses by Lamartine or Victor Hugo from their lofty position up there, while those too shy and reserved to do that simply kept their faces buried in *Paris-Dakar*, the only daily paper we had in those days.⁴⁶

This memory of the *évolués*, of the monkey-mother and her children, of the colonial collaborators who emerged from the shadow of negritude's Africa, with the grandmother's song, the red earth, and finally the ancestral home,⁴⁷ is of a piece with the song of Africa as a home both longed for and the place where the worst of the magic is produced.

The novel ends as Yacine, transformed into the white Marie-Gabrielle von Bolkowsky—fulfilling her secret wish—is stripped of her children and expelled from the country. Yacine's enemy, Bigué Samb, Assane's first wife and childhood lover, has defeated her—she the toubab monkey-mother—leaving the family with the two monkey-children. On his deathbed Nguirane reclaims them, restoring what the colonial past had taken from the community. He tells Bigué Samb they are human—and their own children to boot. When she states, "Which children, Nguirane? Do you mean the two little offsprings of this monkey?" he responds:

"You must regain your self-control, Bigué Samb," says Nguirane Faye in a voice which suddenly sounds tense and shaky. "You must get a grip: Mbissine and Mbissane are *my* grandchildren."

There is a long pause. Nguirane Faye has never spoken to her with so much intensity. Suddenly, Bigué Samb is overcome by emotion. She's understood that he is bidding her farewell.

"I have heard you, Nguirane," she says.

"They are your children, too, Bigué. Look after them well. Turn them into human beings."

"I have heard you, Faye."

"Yes. *Nobody can be a child and a monkey at the same time.*"⁴⁸

Diop doesn't leave it at this, with the two worlds of the unreal and the real separated by the natural order. That would restore what the allegorical fantasies sought to undo and align reality with a social order grounded in the patriarchal and autocratic. Nguirane is the old man, but also the revolutionary—like his hero Cheikh Anta Diop. If it is the dignity of a certain Africa that

has been undone by the toubab conquest and intervention that can only be the beginning of the story that ended with Rwanda and Wade.

We don't know whether Yacine has become the white Marie-Gabrielle von Bolkowsky or the monkey-mother. The answer that might have been supplied by the guardians of the order is deconstructed. In this novel monkeys and humans slide ungracefully into each other's space and cannot escape the follies of an ordering where the autochthonous have been displaced in their very home, in their very originary thoughts.

Why would a white woman want to take two African children—steal two African children—and take them back to Europe? In an age of postcolonial theft, anything is possible. Capturing Marie-Gabrielle must become a question for the police to resolve. The problems arise when it becomes a question for keystone cops and magical robbers:

The policeman smiles. You can tell the man is quite proud of himself in his faded blue uniform. In our current state of confusion, we are all looking to him for guidance. That's probably why he sounds so neutral and rational that he seems slightly *blasé*, which can be frustrating for those who are constantly seeking thrills and excitement.

"Yes," he says, "we are in the process of investigating this trafficking. That's exactly what happened today. Thanks to the police informer who tipped us off, it wasn't difficult to nab the woman. We had her particulars, and besides, she was extremely agitated. As soon as she knew she was exposed, she fled."

The man who offered the policeman a cigarette is surprised:

"So it's in fact not true that she turned into a female monkey?"

He seems both disconcerted and profoundly disappointed.

The policeman takes a few puffs of his cigarette and while watching the rings of smoke rising slowly in the air, he says to him with a wry little smile:

"You don't actually believe in such fairytales, do you, my brother? People don't turn into monkeys or butterflies or whatever, just like that!"⁴⁹

Once we think we know the answer, the question returns, and the toubabs pop up like monkeys, playfully transforming from the one into the other: "Then, literally out of nowhere, the rumour started that a she-monkey and her two kids had gone into hiding back in Niarela by leaping from tree to tree, just as a raid around the airport was being organized."⁵⁰

Notes

1. Boubacar Boris Diop, *Doomi Golo: The Hidden Diaries* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2016), 370; emphasis in original.

2. *Ibid.*, 9.

3. *Ibid.*, 383.

4. According to tradition, the Ninki Nanka lives in the swamps of West Africa. The animal is said to be extremely large and very dangerous. It is said that when children get too confident and feel they can disobey their parents and go into the swamp, they will be taken by the Ninki Nanka. This creature's tales were never recorded in any sort of nonmodern text, but the story of it has spread from tribe to tribe all over Africa, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/5180404.stm>. *Casamance au clair de lune* (1984) by the Senegalese music group, Touré Kunda, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQSKF9506r0>.

A group of "dragon hunters" from the Centre for Fortean Zoology (CFZ) went to Gambia in the summer of 2006 to investigate the Ninki Nanka and take testimony from those who claimed to have seen the mythical creature. One interviewee who claimed to have had an encounter with a Ninki Nanka said it looked similar to an image of a Chinese dragon. The expedition, known as the J. T. Downes Memorial Gambia Expedition 2006, received a fair amount of media attention, including coverage in a BBC Online article.

5. British Broadcasting Corporation, "Hunt for Gambia's Mythical Dragon," <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/5180404.stm>.

6. Jennie E. Burnet, Review of "Murambi, the Book of Bones: A Novel," *African Studies Review* 51, no. 3 (December 2008): 213–14.

7. "Bouts de bois de Dieu," Wolof for *children*.

8. Diop, *Doomi Golo*, 225.

9. Teno repeats this same image in his *Afrique, je te plumerai*, when the grandfather tells the tale of the invading birds as well.

10. Kofi Awoonor, "The Weaver Bird," in *The Promise of Hope: New and Selected Poems, 1964–2013* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014).

11. Peter Geschiere, *The Perils of Belonging: Autochthony, Citizenship, and Exclusion in Africa and Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009): chapter 2. See also Peter Geschiere, *Witchcraft, Intimacy, and Trust: Africa in Comparison* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013): chapter 1.

12. Geschiere, *Witchcraft, Intimacy, and Trust*, xv.

13. *Ibid.*, xvi.

14. Pius Adesanmi, personal communication.

15. Geschiere, *Witchcraft, Intimacy, and Trust*, chapters 2 and 3.

16. Article II: In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CrimeOfGenocide.asp>

17. Diop, *Doomi Golo*, 116.

18. Alison Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2014).

19. Proving one's ancestor's burial could be, and was, disputed. Those attempting to prove their local provenance were sent from place to place by officials intent on disenfranchising them.

20. David Diop, "Africa, My Africa," in *Coups de Pilon* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1956).

21. The basic outlines of Afrocentricity are located in Cheikh Anta Diop's *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality?* (New York: L. Hill, 1974).

22. Diop, *Doomi Golo*, 5.

23. *Ibid.*, 8.

24. *Ibid.*, 11.

25. The mourning of the one who migrates is also a feature present in Alain Mabanckou's *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*. The author recounts the words spoken by his mother thus: "France! The Congo! They've plotted to steal my son away, my only reason for living! There are lots of children in this country, why not send them to France instead of you? Look at me sitting here now! I'm as good as dead" (19). I am grateful to Jack Taylor for this reference.

26. Diop, *Doomi Golo*, 10.

27. *Ibid.*, 51.

28. *Ibid.*, 112.

29. *Ibid.*, 225.

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Ibid.*

32. Ghostly presences abound in this seemingly ordinary quartier of Dakar, this quartier nestled between the Medina and Rebeuss, where many live close together in relatively modest circumstances, a stone's throw from the wealthy streets of the Plateau and the dangerous neighborhood surrounding the prison, its interior described as "another world" inside Dakar. "Un autre monde à l'intérieur de Dakar, c'est ce qu'est véritablement la Maison d'arrêt et de correction de Rebeuss. Les longs murs blancs surmontés des barbelés témoignent que l'endroit est différent des autres et qu'on est bien dans le «domicile» des privés de liberté, lieu communément appelé 100 mètres carrés. De loin, on aperçoit le mirador. À l'entrée principale règne un silence d'enterrement, des gardes pénitentiaires surveillent tout"; http://www.seneweb.com/news/Societe/la-maison-d-arret-et-de-correction-de-rebeuss-un-enfer-pour-plus-d-un-millier-de-detenus_n_48447.html.

33. Diop, *Doomi Golo*, 64.

34. *Ibid.*, 64–65.

35. *Ibid.*, 65; emphasis in original.

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*

38. *Ibid.*, 66.

39. *Ibid.*, 66–67.

40. *Ibid.*, 67–68.

41. *Ibid.*, 96. The theme of prophets who were not recognized in their home and forced to leave is echoed here. In particular, Muhammed had to leave Mecca for Medina, where, as an outsider, he was welcomed and accepted.

42. Diop, *Doomi Golo*, 100.

43. *Ibid.*, 101.

44. *Ibid.*, 114.

45. *Ibid.*, 112.

46. *Ibid.*, 215.

47. This is the same shadow described so well by James Ferguson in his *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), and by Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, eds., *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

48. Diop, *Doomi Golo*, 379; emphasis added.

49. *Ibid.*, 383.

50. *Ibid.*, 385.

Mapping “Sacred” Space in Leila Aboulela’s *The Translator* and *Minaret*

Andrew H. Armstrong

“No matter what, I will return. This is my base and goal; everything else is variable.”

—Leila Aboulela

“I can carry [religion] with me wherever I go, whereas the other things can easily be taken away from me.”

—Leila Aboulela

“My idea of religion wasn’t about a woman not working or having to dress in a certain way. It was more to do with the faith.”

—Leila Aboulela

Some of the primary concerns in Leila Aboulela’s fiction are women, faith, and space. These themes are present from her first novel *The Translator* to *Minaret*, *Lyric’s Alley*, and *The Kindness of Enemies* in which her female protagonists are involved in a contest for space, particularly a space to practice their faith as a vital facet of their daily lives, a space that I read here as sacred space. By sacred space, I refer to a concept that moves beyond Mircea Eliade’s idea of a space that is distinctly opposed to what he sees as the profane, to a more fluid notion of space that also includes physical and mental spaces that are accommodating, intimate, and life assuring. In this context, sacred space is not tied exclusively to religion, its doctrines and rituals, but is a way of conceiving the world and being-in-the-world that includes one’s intimate relationship with loved ones, family, and the community. In both *The Translator* and *Minaret*, Aboulela’s migration narratives evince a deep concern for the place of her Muslim protagonists in often religious and racially intolerant European societies. In all her novels, her migrant and often out-of-place protagonists seem to

undergo a process of rebirth, of having to produce a new life from the brokenness of the old, from the shards of often painful memories. This is enabled, I argue, by their construction and utilization of sacred space. Aboulela shares the view expressed by Amin Malak in the introduction to *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English* that "many Muslims regard religion as a key component of their identity that could rival, if not supersede, their class, race, gender, or ethnic affiliation."¹ Religion and faith remain central concerns in Aboulela's fiction to the extent that some of her expository passages read like spiritual exhortations.

In Aboulela's fiction her women often negotiate space at the intersection of faith, gender, and race—often moving, physically and imaginatively, between Britain and an African home while still at home in either Scotland or England. In this chapter I discuss the charting of this journey as a key factor in Aboulela's migrant narratives. I move beyond such conceptual categories as postcolonialism and feminism to a much broader and deeper concern with migration beyond boundaries by paying attention to the creation of new space and new thinking on women and/in migration and diaspora. The challenge to be posed and teased out here is how to create new spaces within the seemingly conservative and narrow world of religion. I wish particularly to examine how Aboulela's narrators map faith onto space in their protagonists' quest for self-actualization through a close reading of her first two novels, *The Translator* and *Minaret*. I demonstrate the ways Aboulela imagines faith as both a conceptual category and a lived experience through Sammar in *The Translator* and Najwa in *Minaret*. What this chapter primarily seeks to tease out is how Aboulela's fiction also attempts to overcome the problems of displacement and dislocation by making faith itself connective and meaningful. This is done by acknowledging that the spatial features of displacement and dislocation are caused initially by the move to a new, unsettled place from an old, settled, and familiar one. Accordingly, this chapter is divided into three interrelated sections: an introduction that sets out the contours for the discussion; an examination of the structure of both novels as it relates to mapping and literary cartography—in effect, place as real, imaginary, and symbolic;² and, finally, a discussion of religion and faith as they relate to the consciousness and mental states of the female protagonists—mapping the interior or faith as wayfinding.

Establishing a Cartography of Reading or Mapping as a Reading Practice

In my preparation for this chapter, two of the texts consulted were Sandra Ponzanesi's and Daniela Merolla's edited text, *Migrant Cartographies: New Cultural and Literary Spaces in Post-Colonial Europe*, and James Procter's *Dwelling Places: Postwar Black British Writing*, whose titles resonate with the twin themes/issues of travel and dwelling, respectively. These texts foreground and examine migration as a spatial phenomenon as well as a political one. Both texts take on

the weighty issues of travel, place, and space in migration narratives. In short, both texts foreground travel and dwelling as important concerns in mapping migrant itineraries and experiences in migration narratives. Travel and dwelling have been persistent issues/concerns in migration literature and studies. The journey from one place to another—the push and pull factors that influence the journey—and the living conditions and hospitality (or hostility) of the host country have been the theme of fiction, drama, film, poetry, and the concomitant literary criticism and theory that have accompanied these texts. The suggestion coming from these two concerns is that space is a vital factor in both the migration experience (travel and settling in) and migration narratives. Travel and dwelling are spatial processes in the sense that people move through space (as well as time) in order to get from one place to another and in order to settle or dwell in a particular location. I draw on Bakhtin's spatio-temporal configuration of the chronotope—whether the city, the airplane, the train, or the bus. In particular, I examine how the chronotope is used as a device for structuring space and time around events or moments in the lives of both Sammar and Najwa. I am thinking here about how they both develop and change in the novels, and how they come into being as individuals and members of a community. We look, therefore, beyond temporal ordering of consciousness to a more spatial configuration.

Procter observes that dwelling may be seen as “a spatial and temporal process rather than a signifier of closure or resolution.”³ Following the idea of the chronotope above, dwelling operates within the processual, unfolding present and not within a closed world or system of arrival. Perhaps we can say that there is dwelling in travel in as much as there is travel in dwelling. But we may also identify specific modes of travel, specific modes of dwelling, and, consequently, specific modes of literary representation. As a result, we can argue that spatial politics are at the heart of migration literature, especially in cases where the politics of space is complicated by the politics of otherness present in many migration narratives. The struggle of most, if not all, migrants is a struggle for place and space in their new countries. This is especially so since difference and displacement are key factors in the migrant's life. It is not merely a question of *who* the migrant is but also *where* the migrant is. This question of *where* (the spatial experience) is my primary focus of this chapter on Leila Aboulela's first two novels, *The Translator* and *Minaret*. In these novels, the question of *where* is complicated, ironically, by the question of *who*. The protagonists of these novels are not only African and black but also women and Muslim. I argue that it is their Muslim identities and their place as women in their social spaces, and *not* their identities as black and African, that are foregrounded in the author's mapping of space in these narratives. In an interview, Aboulela foregrounds the role and importance of religion and faith to her life—as the second epigraph above demonstrates—and speaks of how faith is more important to her as a living strategy than the “other things.” The other things here may refer to her studies and professional life in addition to her social life, which, though important, cannot supersede her faith. This is reflected in Najwa's concern, in

the first epigraph, that religion, her faith, is her "base and goal; everything else is variable."⁴ Thus, my concern here is with the intricate and delicate mapping or charting of a little considered factor in the lives of many migrants—that of their personal religion, their faith as a part of their enabling strategy of survival and meaning-making in a new social space.

The idea of mapping that undergirds my discussion is informed by Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift's idea of mapping as "wayfinding,"⁵ as commensurate with the journey and how to find ways toward one's destination, however provisional. In terms of mapping sacred space, I am thinking of locating and consecrating space as a way toward being at home there; of finding one's self at peace in this space. In this regard, as Pile and Thrift point out, we must be "ever mindful of the so many things which subjects must find their way through—'relations of power'/'sites of power'—in order to find out where they are."⁶ Accordingly, they locate six "pathways over the terrain of the subject," which are "position, movement, practices, encounters, visibility and aesthetics/ethics."⁷ Although I will not be focusing directly on all six of these "pathways," they will inform many of the positions I take with regard to mapping sacred space. In this regard, we may also speak of waymaking as the manner in which Aboulela's protagonists make ways for themselves to survive in these difficult "cold" cities. While *wayfinding* suggests that the place is already there to be rediscovered, *waymaking* suggests the creation of new spaces, new routes, new ways, as a means toward living—being, doing, and having.

What is meant by *mapping*? How and why do you map? How are Aboulela and her female protagonists doing this? Or, rather, can we not see mapping here as a critical exercise or a way of reading the subjects/subjectivities in these novels? It is less that Aboulela, the writer, is mapping; the reader engages in a form of mapping or critical cartography by engaging the narrative and, by extension, the migrant subjectivity. We are engaged here, then, in Jameson's idea of "cognitive mapping" where the reader imposes a cognitive cartography—a way of reading—that charts the course, movements, and moments in the texts, especially at crucial narrative moments. Thus, to borrow from Eric Bulson, I am engaging "directly and indirectly with the ways that novels orient readers by producing and circulating forms of geographical knowledge . . . [by] emphasiz[ing] that spatial representations in the novel are ideologically charged."⁸ Bulson concludes: "Readers do not simply see the world: they get a distorted, biased glimpse rooted in a particular time and place."⁹

How do both Sammar and Najwa create their own space in Aberdeen and London, respectively? For both women, these cities are not exactly strange places when they go to live there. Sammar was born in Scotland; Najwa had spent a number of summers and holidays in London. In both cases, then, neither was traveling to the United Kingdom for the first time.

To conclude the framing of this discussion, I want to take up an idea put forward by James Procter in a review of Aboulela's short-story collection, *Coloured Lights*, where in his conclusion he states, "Like all her works to date, it dwells on the *synaptic spaces* between languages, words, images, identities and cultures."¹⁰

I find the idea of synaptic spaces in Aboulela's work very provocative and useful for the angle I take in this chapter. The synaptic space is the space of communication between cells. It depends on the principle of networking and cooperation. It connotes dialogue, conversation, negotiation, flow, and counterflow. Here I am taking a neurobiological term and applying it to the close reading of texts. I am reading Aboulela's two novels as creating new spaces for a consideration of migration and dwelling in our contemporary world. According to Cecelia Scoppetta, "Developing a new imagination of spatial phenomena may enable re-assessing their socio-political features, challenges and potentials. In fact, this innovative spatial concept means re-interpreting space as an open and dynamic multiplicity of relations through which power is being constantly re-shaped. This implies changes in powers across the existing tiers of decision-making, original scales of intervention, new actor constellations, and variable geometries of governance."¹¹ In both novels Aboulela opens space through a process of focalization that maps imaginative space on to actual space. What the two protagonists see, whether in the streets of Aberdeen and London or on the trains and buses, is recoded and reconfigured as intimate space. In doing so, she indeed "re-interprets space as an open and dynamic multiplicity of relations through which power is being constantly re-shaped." Why this need to reshape power? Who constructs this space in the two novels? Why is it necessary for Sammar and Najwa to have "sacred space"?

Mapping the Text: Organizing the "Inner" Space of *The Translator* and *Minaret*

One of the ways of answering the questions posed above is to examine the structure or organization of the two novels and to discuss the effect of mapping space. What I am examining here, therefore, is narrative structure, which at its fundamental level is plot and setting, both of which are concerned with space and mapping. According to Michel de Certeau, stories are concerned with spatial practices: "Every day, they traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories. . . . Every story is a travel story—a spatial practice."¹² In this section, then, the concern is with the ways that Aboulela constructs and maps space in plot and setting in these two novels. I am concerned with the pathways and trajectories that both Sammar and Najwa take, both physically and conceptually, on their journeys of becoming to realize their dreams, toward fulfillment and toward the keeping of their faith. Through her narrators and protagonists Aboulela creates a careful mapping of space: Sammar in Scotland and later in Khartoum; Najwa in Khartoum and later in London. The structuring of both novels facilitates this. This is seen in the way that Najwa's orientation in/to London comes about in *Minaret*. Sammar, in *The Translator*, follows a similar trajectory.

Whether the final organization of the novel into chapters, sections, and parts is the decision of the author, the editor, or both, some conscious decisions have to be made in doing so. In both *The Translator* and *Minaret*, we encounter novels whose structural organization is facilitated by metaphors of movement and dwelling.

The Translator is divided into two parts and is carefully mapped, delicately woven, and heavily nuanced. Part one, the longer part, is set in Aberdeen. It sets up the love relationship between Sammar and Rae Isles, the white liberal scholar, a postcolonial historian who is open to Islam. He's seen as an Islamic expert: he sometimes works in the intellectual expert industry. This section ends with Sammar's departure for home in Khartoum, on the British Airways plane to Africa. Part two narrates Sammar's return to Khartoum. Sammar goes home, but is still in exile. She is, in fact, exiled from Rae—from the man she loves. In this section of the novel, Rae journeys toward Sammar in Khartoum. How important is Rae's journey (migration) to Sammar?

In *Novels, Maps, Modernity: The Spatial Imagination, 1850–2000*, Eric Bulson points out that "Street signs, place names, and other orientational landmarks are everywhere in the modern novel and have played a crucial role in the production of reality for centuries. They identify a location out there in the world."¹³ One identifies Bulson's point in a close reading of both *The Translator* and *Minaret* where the protagonists, as located subjects, cross countries and national borders, traverse streets, occupy dwelling places in their wayfinding gestures of being at one with themselves. I say being-at-one with themselves rather than being-at-home because neither Sammar nor Najwa seem overly anxious about finding or making a home in Aberdeen or London over that of being at peace with oneself.

Both women seem to be in search of wholeness, an ontological well-being that transcends situated place. Thus, spatial and cartographic metaphors recur in both novels. In *The Translator* such metaphors are present from the opening scene in the Winter Gardens in Aberdeen to the closing scene in Khartoum with Rae and Sammar looking out at the city on a dark night. In the opening scene of the novel, Sammar goes out to meet Rae under a "grey October sky, Scottish grey with mist from the North Sea . . . clutching her blue folder with the translation of Al-Nidaa's manifesto."¹⁴ Thus, Sammar is located *somewhere* in the textual world of the novel—in Scotland, in October. When Sammar enters the Winter Gardens, parenthetically described as "an extended greenhouse in Duthie Park,"¹⁵ we are given an even more specific location or place for our protagonist as a *located subject* in the opening lines of the novel. Here, Sammar enters a world "covered with signs. Sorry, no prams or pushchairs allowed, sorry, no dogs allowed, opening hours 9.30 till dusk."¹⁶ Sammar observes, "In this country everything was labelled, everything had a name. She had got used to the explicitness, all the signs and polite rules."¹⁷ The signs and rules function as maps, means of pointing the way to what is both allowed and not allowed. The signs mark out space, even sacred space, access, and limits. The signs work here as

wayfinders. These signs and rules mark Sammar's textual journey. As translator to the "Middle-East historian and lecturer in Postcolonial Politics,"¹⁸ Rae Isles, Sammar functions in the text more as mediator and negotiator than a translated insider. She is Rae's access to a world of the texts she translates for him. However, Aboulela translates this limited access into intimate, sacred space through the love relationship she constructs between Sammar and Rae, much of which is played out in Sammar's consciousness for most of the novel. In fact, it is only when Rae converts and travels to Khartoum in search of Sammar that we get his perspective of the love relationship. Thus, the novel's structure or organization helps to frame space through a number of key relationships—that between Sammar and Rae; Sammar and Yasmin; Sammar and Aberdeen; Sammar and Khartoum, and, most importantly, Sammar and her faith.

It is in the relationship between Sammar and Rae that the reader gets the most concrete example of the mapping of sacred space as both individuals have to find their way to acceptable grounds or acceptable terms of living. In the context of the relationship between Sammar and Rae, we may view sacred space as the space of mutual respect and admiration—seen in the almost reverential way that Rae treats Sammar, even in work-related matters, especially in their discussions of the Quran and Arabic words and phrases. One does not get the sense of a patronizing, condescending man looking down on a widowed, displaced African woman. This is a relationship between a man and a woman—a Western public intellectual and a private Muslim woman. We can even see it as a Muslim love story. However, Sammar has no intention of abandoning her religion and beliefs for Rae, but Rae, too, cannot easily translate or convert to Islam, although he is familiar with some of its tenets and is generally sympathetic toward Islam. As a public intellectual, who is often called in by the press as an expert on Islamic matters, Rae is conscious of what a conversion to Islam may mean for his career. In addition, as a Middle East expert, Rae is himself a translator since he has to translate and recode Islam and the Middle East for his Western consumers. His appearances on television to give an insider's view on Islam and Middle East politics present him functioning as translator and mediator. He mediates between his knowledge of Islam, gained mainly through intellectual activity, and the ignorance of his Western audience. He informs, recodes, and repositions for his consumers. Yet the novel places both Rae and Sammar in a sympathetic love relationship, the story of which is embedded in the migration narrative. In fact, one may see the love story as the dominant narrative in this novel, at times complicating the migration story. In *The Translator*, Aboulela does this by her use of the romantic or love story model in which to tell her story. She creates a new generic space by employing the love story format/model in this migration narrative.

The use of the love story format here allows Aboulela, in the words of James Procter, to dwell on the synaptic spaces between languages, words, images, identities, and cultures (especially in the issue of translation). And it is precisely these soft spaces—not because the protagonists are women—that make for the highly nuanced, delicately woven texture of Aboulela's fiction. In fact,

one may conclude that Sammar's and Rae's relationship occurs and develops within such a soft space, which not only allows Sammar to grow spiritually, but, in the end, allows for Rae's conversion and subsequent marriage to Sammar, thus giving the reader the "satisfactory ending" that the romantic story requires. An example of Sammar's growth in her relationship with Rae as his translator and close friend is seen when they are discussing the translation of the hadiths. Sammar observes that "A lot of the hadiths that are quoted have already been translated before, so I am working faster than I thought I would be. I am learning a lot, things I didn't know before."¹⁹ The narrator then interjects: "Here in Scotland she was learning more about her own religion, the world was one cohesive place."²⁰ Rae then asks her, "What things haven't you come across before?"²¹ It is clear that her relationship with Rae, rather than threatening, ironically, heightens her sense of her own faith. Thus, we can say that the use of the romantic model here also asserts the genre's (fiction's) power to create (explore) new connections and new unifying structures. Perhaps we can consider the novel a romantic novel in the sense too that it fulfills the requirements of a love story. Two basic elements comprise every romance novel: a central love story and an emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending.

In the central love story, the main plot centers on individuals falling in love and struggling to make the relationship work. A writer can include as many subplots as he or she wants as long as the love story is the main focus of the novel. This is certainly the case in *The Translator* in which the love story between Sammar and Rae is central to the story and discourse, plot, and structure. But more to the point, the love story between Sammar and Rae is heavily reliant on Sammar's maintenance of her faith. This is nowhere more effectively dramatized than in the closing pages of the novel's first part in which Sammar seeks a decision from Rae that he could possibly convert to Islam in order to give realization to a love they both acknowledge. Rae's only response at this time is "I am not sure."²² The resulting conversation is a key part of this section of the novel and informs Rae's subsequent conversion:

She said, 'Do you know what it means for us?'

'I know. I've always known.'

'I imagined we could get married today.' Her voice startled and bruised her, like sea-salt. 'Now, and I could go with you to Stirling. I don't want to go to Egypt.'

'How could we get married now?' The same distress in his voice. . . .

'I thought you were homesick,' he finally said, 'and this anti-terrorist project would be a chance for you to go on to Khartoum, see your son. Maybe I made a mistake in suggesting it . . .'

'It wasn't a mistake. I was homesick for the place, how everything looked. But I don't know what kind of sickness it would be, to be away from you.'

He said, 'I know what my sickness would be . . .'

'Don't say no then, not sure is better than no, don't ever say no.'

'It's not in me to be religious,' he said. 'I studied Islam for the politics of the Middle East. I did not study it for myself. I was not searching for something spiritual. Some people do. . . . I believed the best I could do . . . was to be objective, detached. . . .

'It's not enough,' she pressed her hands together. 'It's not enough. It's not enough for me.'²³

The above passage dramatizes with great effect the intensity of the relationship between Sammar and Rae. What had been hinted at or whispered about earlier in the novel is laid bare for the reader. Not only do we get the intensity of Sammar's feelings for Rae and his for her, we also see Sammar's commitment to her faith mapped out clearly at this key point in the story in her exclamation "It's not enough," repeated three times. Told as it is here, the narrative dramatizes that it is an exile from Rae—from her love, from him—that she escapes to Khartoum. It thus gives narrative force to Rae's decision to convert and follow her to Khartoum. One other important point to be made from these dialogic exchanges between Sammar and Rae is the way the love story challenges certain views of patriarchy; the man-woman relationship need not be feudal and disempowering for women. The mutual respect between Sammar and Rae enables a relationship free of the feudalism and patriarchal man-handling seen to be disabling factors in the man-woman relationship. In fact, as Renata Pepicelli observes, "Aboulela's pious women are not submissive and subjected by men in the way that a certain collective imagination would have them be. Instead both Najwa and Sammar challenge many stereotypes about Muslim women."²⁴

Rae's decision to convert brings about the other part of the love story format: an emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending. In a romance, the lovers who risk and struggle for each other and their relationship are rewarded with emotional justice and unconditional love. Rae's conversion guarantees this. It is a conversion that is skillfully mapped within the contours of the narrative. Sammar leaves Aberdeen just after the heated exchange between herself and Rae, an exchange in which "hard" words are spoken and hearts are "laid open." This is the climactic point of the plot with its heightened atmosphere and carefully nuanced narrative conjoined with sharp dialogue. Sammar muses, "I am not feminine enough coming here to ask him to marry me when I should have waited to be asked."²⁵ Rae confronts Sammar with "Why did you talk to me then? From the beginning, why did you start all this. You should have left me alone. You had no right. If you were content in your religion . . .,"²⁶ to which Sammar replies, "I'm not content, there are too many things I can't justify to myself. Of course I'm not content. Isn't it obvious to you?"²⁷ Coming to the end of the exchange, Sammar says what may be considered cruel words to Rae:

'I'm not fooled by you. Just because you were kind to me and paid me attention. That's all. But you would have always been second best . . . And I don't want to live here for the rest of my life with this stupid weather

and stupid snow. Do you know what I wish for you? Do you know what I'm going to pray and curse you with? I'm going to pray that if it's not me then it's no one else and you can live the rest of your life alone and miserable. There really must be something wrong with you to have been divorced *twice*, not once, but twice . . .'²⁸

What we see demonstrated in these words is not only the intense, deeply personal nature of the lovers' quarrel but also the mapping or charting of a trajectory that provides the context, within this closely plotted novel, for Sammar's departure from Aberdeen and from Rae. Certainly when Rae responds with "Go away . . . get out of here. . . . Get away from me,"²⁹ the scene has been set for Sammar's "migration" from Rae: "She . . . left the room without looking back . . . went home and telephoned a taxi to take her to the airport."³⁰ This dramatic, theatrical scene, then, provides the context, not only for Sammar's departure for Khartoum, but also for Rae's later conversion and migration to Sammar in Khartoum. In a sense, the migration of the leading dramatis personae to Khartoum, with a change of scene and the fitting time lapse that includes Rae's off-stage conversion, provides a fitting denouement to this love story.

When Rae migrates to Khartoum, risking his academic career, he takes the risky step of a true lover that brings about "emotional justice" and the satisfying ending common to the love story plot. Rae's conversion, which brings about the happy ending, is, however, not a flight of fancy—the fantastic element that ends the love story. Aboulela instead, makes it the natural outcome of a healthy and vital relationship between two people who have suffered loss and who find in each other a sense of well-being and fulfillment. It is emotional justice.

Minaret is divided or mapped differently from *The Translator*; it is in six parts and moves backward and forward in time and place. It has a mixed spatio-temporality. There is a brief prologue in which Najwa frames her position in the novel as narrator/protagonist, as an internal focalizer who has "come down in the world."³¹ In fact, this prologue is a prelude to the main story, set in England, of Najwa's relationship with Lamya, her daughter Mai, Lamya's mother Doctora Zeinab, and, of course, Tamer, Lamya's brother and Najwa's "lover." Part one is set in Khartoum, in 1984–85. It is the story of Najwa and Omar as teenage students at the University of Khartoum. It tells of the happy, spoiled life in their father's house as members of a political elite. This section ends with the arrest of Baba, their father—the fall of the house of Baba and the flight to London. The remainder of the novel is set in London and moves back and forth in time, carefully mapped to reveal the coming-into-being of Najwa. While part two is set in 2003 and sets up the narrative present following the prologue: the meeting with the family—Lamya, Mai, Tamer, and Doctora Zeinab—part three focuses on the period between 1989 and 1990, the early years in London. These are the years of anxiety resulting from the death of Najwa's mother. Missing details from the previous sections are filled in here, giving shape to Najwa's early life in London. Part four is concerned

with the period between 2003 and 2004 and reveals Najwa's coming together and finding herself more and more. The Eid party is an important event in this section of the novel. Part five, set in 1991, takes the reader back to early life in London. Two of the more important events here are Najwa's conversion, followed by her decision to leave the parasitic Anwar. Finally, part six returns to 2004—the present—to what I call the “where-now” of Najwa's coming-into-being: her expulsion from her job as maid to Lamya; the breakup with Tamer; the sacrifice; the broken love story and her decision to move on with her faith. *Minaret* thus covers two decades in the life of Najwa, in great detail, in a carefully crafted novel. We see her coming of age; we see her styling and restyling.

In *Minaret*, space is constructed through Najwa's physical and spiritual journeys and through her relationships, first, with her family in Khartoum in the first part of the novel; with her mother and brother in the early days in London; with her parasitic lover, Anwar; with Mai, as her nanny; her love affair with Tamer; with the women of the mosque and, like Sammar, with her faith. Unlike Sammar, who was born in Aberdeen, Najwa was a frequent visitor to parts of Europe through her father's fortune, amassed as a member of the political elite. The novel begins with a spatial shift with Najwa stating, “I have come down in the world.”³² This signals both a shift in class and perspective: “I've slid to a place where the ceiling is low and there isn't much room to move.”³³ At the literal level, Najwa has slid from the spacious room in her father's house in Khartoum to a room, probably an attic room, where she is cramped for space. Her space is constricted, easily affecting her movement and dwelling. One of the triumphs of the novel, therefore, is the way in which Aboulela transforms confined space through the wider conceptual lenses she gives to Najwa. Najwa's perspectival range is not limited by her apparently confined space. One of the ways she expands her space is through travel within the city. Through these modes of travel, Najwa, like many other migrants, negotiates her way through London and in many instances turning the unfamiliar into the familiar. We see this on one of her visits to see her brother, Omar, in prison: “The train comes out of the underground tunnel. There is sunlight and grass now, the houses of outer London. Every time the train stops more people get out and hardly anyone boards. We are nearing the end of the line. I am closer to Omar now. . . . A bus takes me from the station to the prison.”³⁴ The train and the bus function as “markers of dwelling” in addition to being physical modes of transportation or movement.³⁵ James Procter argues that “specific modes of travel . . . walking in the street, commuting in the suburbs, travelling in the country . . . are in themselves markers of dwelling. . . . To travel in this context is also to dwell, to be grounded in a particular landscape.”³⁶

One of the reasons for constant travel in any location is to familiarize oneself with the foreign—to bring the distant and strange within one's range in an attempt to rid oneself of, or cope with, the anxieties of being away. This is a particular concern of the migrant who chooses to stay, yet there is little evidence in *Minaret* of Najwa's connections with people outside of her Muslim community. The social environment in this novel, though set primarily in

London, is the narrow world of a particular community. Thus, there are two oscillating movements in the novel: on the one hand, the narrative expands confined space through Najwa's imaginative range; on the other, Aboulela makes a smaller world of London by setting her story within this community, and indeed among a small, select group of actors.

Ironically, Najwa's networking with the other Muslim women in London within this small community is her source of strength, her salvation, so to speak. Najwa, unlike Sammar, is cut off from the networking strength of a Khartoum family. She has had to flee from Sudan in search of asylum in London, which is more a place to hide than an alternative home. In contrast to her life in Khartoum as a younger woman, where she lived as a little princess in a fine castle, attending numerous parties and enjoying the fruits of her father's ill-gotten gains, and where faith and religious matters meant little to her, Najwa's life in London, as a woman on her own, without the shelter of wealth and social positions, forces her to journey inward to find some way of surviving and some enablement for living in this strange place. Much of this support comes from the women in the mosque. It is here where she learns of the opening for a nanny for the young girl she cares for. It is here where she meets Shahinaz and forms a close, nurturing bond and learns, in the Tajweed classes, to "read the Qur'an in a beautiful way"³⁷—another example of the creation of sacred, synaptic space. But it is in Aboulela's representation of the women at the ladies' Eid party that we get an intimate and very special portrait of female fellowship and friendship. Here, Najwa and the reader not only get a look at the women behind the hijab but also participate in an act of feminine fellowship within a decidedly womanist sacred space:

On the way to my seat I greet those of my friends I hadn't seen earlier, the few I hadn't met yesterday at the Eid prayer. We are pleased to see each other without our hijabs and all dressed up for the party, delighted by the rare sight of each other's hair, the skin on our necks, the way make-up brightens a face. We look at each and smile in surprise. It is not only the party clothes; some of us are transformed without our hijabs. For a split second I cannot connect the tight trouser suit, the geometrically cut blonde hair, the perfectly applied make-up with the young woman who is usually covered in sombre black . . . [t]oday she is as glamorous as a guest on a television talk show.³⁸

This uncovering of the Muslim women, which takes place in a sacred space, does not carry the shame, nakedness, and disgrace usually associated with it in a dangerous and feudal patriarchy. Instead, it is invoked in a language of admiration and reverence for the woman and the female body. And it must be remembered that this is linked to that group of caring, sharing, yet powerful women of the mosque.

In a sense, Aboulela has wrested the mosque from exclusively patriarchal hands and made it a site, symbol, and sign of female empowerment in London.

There is a much more intimate feel to the mosque through the eyes and stories of these women. I stop short of saying that they feminize the mosque, but this narrative of the mosque is supported by a female subjectivity that strategically limits the power of men by mapping them differently, by giving a greater presence to the women. Thus, the mosque proves to be a source of strength and help to Najwa. Even after her broken relationship with the younger Tamer, one senses that she will move beyond this through the strength she receives from her fellowship with the other women. In fact, the novel ends with Najwa in prayer with Shahinaz, one of her friends from the mosque, musing that “no matter what, I will return. This is my base and goal; everything else is variable.”³⁹ It is the constancy of her faith that restores, revives, and shapes her life.

Mapping the Interior or Faith as Wayfinding

In this section I engage in a discussion of religion and faith as they relate to the consciousness and mental states of the female protagonists, hence mapping the interior refers to the mental mapping that occurs in the consciousness of both Sammar and Najwa. I am examining the way Aboulela’s narrators in both *The Translator* and *Minaret* sometimes distance the physical city from Sammar’s and Najwa’s minds and at other times make their minds a map of place and space: This can be seen in their highly introspective descriptions of Aberdeen and London. Thus, I am examining the role of imagination in both novels, especially the imaginative work/worlds of Sammar and Najwa. I make the important point that Aboulela’s narrators connect, in a synaptic manner, mind and material space by bridging space between the external and the internal through the mental mapping of both Sammar and Najwa. For example, on her return to Khartoum, Sammar sees the beauty of a Khartoum sunset with “all the colours that she had missed in Aberdeen; yellow and brown, and everything else vivid. Flat land and a peaceful emptiness, space, no grey, no wind, no lines of granite.”⁴⁰ Although she is looking at actual phenomena, she imposes a mental landscaping on the scene before her, translating land into scenery and landscape. Similarly, Najwa produces an act of internal mapping or wayfinding very early in the novel, in the scene where she stands and looks across at the trees in Regent’s Park:

The trees in the park across the road are scrubbed silver and brass. I look up and see the minaret of Regent’s Park mosque visible above the trees. I have never seen it so early in the morning in this vulnerable light. London is at its most beautiful in autumn. In summer it is seedy and swollen, in winter it is overwhelmed by Christmas lights and in spring, the season of birth, there is always disappointment. Now it is at its best, now it is poised like a mature woman whose beauty is no longer fresh but still surprisingly potent.⁴¹

There is a certain maturity in Najwa's observations. This is a migrant who has been in London for over twelve years who seems at ease with her world. Najwa has made a home in this strange city. There is a familiarity born of being-there and making a space to live. More importantly, though, although her view of the seasons may be shared by others, this is Najwa's way of remapping or recoding the traditional European seasonal taxonomy. In a sense, she is making the seasons her own. The interiority of the narrative perspective, of both Sammar and Najwa, speaks to a specific kind of mapping—that of mental wayfinding and waymaking. Both novels are carefully labeled or mapped to demonstrate this by accommodating the performances of the protagonists.

How do both characters create their own space in Aberdeen and London, respectively? For both women these cities were familiar places when they move there. Sammar was born in Scotland; Najwa had spent a number of summers and holidays in London. So, in both cases, neither was traveling to the United Kingdom for the first time. An important point to note is that neither protagonist expresses a desire to return to an original home, so there is less the politics and poetics of home and so much more of the desire to map out a personal space in their respective dwelling places. There is no desire for a lost home. These are not narratives of nostalgia. If there is a longing on the part of Sammar and Najwa, it is for a deeper faith, a deeper spiritual relationship. Neither woman expresses a desire to return to a place of origin. Sammar returns only because Rae does not make the commitment to her that she desires. In a sense, her return to Khartoum is an escape from the pain of a lost love—a loss that is remedied by Rae's conversion and migration to Khartoum. For her part, Najwa does not wish to return to Khartoum, although her son is there. Najwa cannot return because of the circumstances surrounding her departure. She is, in a sense, a political refugee. Najwa and Sammar are concerned with making space—a space to practice their faith as an important aspect of well-being.

Aboulela's women, despite the challenges they face, do not sink into absolute despair and self-destruction. They turn to their faith for renewal, for revision, for identity. Sammar and Najwa are not represented as the repressed or oppressed Islamic or Muslim women. They are instead figured as resilient and creative, although not in a radically feminist sense. I would apply the term *womanist* here, for these two women often find or make space to practice their faith.⁴² Their interpretation and embrace of religion is not of the defeatist or submissive type; instead, they show a stubborn retention of a viable faith that brings them both rewards in the end. In an interview with Saleh Eissa, Aboulela has this to say of her portrayal of Muslim women:

I am interested in writing about Islam not as an identity but going deeper and showing the state of mind and feelings of a Muslim who has faith. . . . I want also to write fiction that follows Islamic logic. This is different than writing 'Islamically correct' literature—I do not do that. My characters do not behave necessarily as a 'good Muslim' should. They are not ideals

or role models. They are, as I see them to be, ordinary Muslims trying to practice their faith in difficult circumstances and in a society which is unsympathetic to religion.⁴³

Throughout her fiction, and especially in *The Translator* and *Minaret*, Aboulela represents the states of mind of her pious Muslim protagonists. The struggle is less about personal identity or even ontological security, but it is consistently a struggle to keep the faith. But even in this, faith is not some hazy, head-in-the-sky fantasy but a way of living, of expressing one's self, a way of being free yet practical in a hostile environment. In the end, these are portraits of the Muslim woman in the West, in Europe, and how she negotiates strange social environments in a search for a place to practice her faith. Yet, ironically, it is in this strange place that Aboulela's women seem to have greater freedom to practice their faith. This is certainly the case with Najwa. In the interview with Sethi, Aboulela has this to say about her personal faith:

“My faith was started off by my grandmother and mother and so I always saw it as a very private, personal thing,” she says. “At the same time, they were very progressive. My grandmother studied medicine in the Forties, which was very rare in Egypt, and my mother was a university professor, so my idea of religion wasn't about a woman not working or having to dress in a certain way; it was more to do with the faith.”

It was only in Britain, where she came to study for her PhD, that she began to feel able to express her faith. “I grew up in a very westernised environment and went to a private, American school. But my personality was shy and quiet and I wanted to wear the hijab but didn't have the courage, as I knew my friends would talk me out of it.” In London, her anonymity helped: “I didn't know anybody. It was 1989 and the word ‘Muslim’ wasn't even really used in Britain at the time; you were either black or Asian. So then I felt very free to wear the hijab.”

So there's more freedom for Muslim women to be religious in Britain? “Oh, definitely. But then you have to decide what you are going to do with all this freedom,” she says with a laugh. “You can do what you like, so being religious is one of the things I chose.”⁴⁴

On her own experience represented in *Minaret*, Aboulela explains: “In a way, the book represents my fears,” adding that “This is what I fight against. I don't want to get stuck. I don't want to be nostalgic for the past. I know it's pointless, especially as I've got children. They've grown up here and are British, so I have to be British too or else they will leave me behind.”⁴⁵ But Aboulela's way of being British is not one of easy assimilation. For her, becoming British does not entail becoming non-Muslim or compromising her faith as a way of being. She represents this in her two protagonists. Tina Steiner makes this point on Aboulela's protagonists: “What is striking about Aboulela's narratives is that her women characters, who are triply marginalised by being

African, Muslim and female, do not succumb to the pressures of assimilation. On the contrary, Aboulela writes revisionist fiction, in which women negotiate migration on their own terms . . . She foregrounds their religious inheritance and its usefulness in countering the anxieties around migration."⁴⁶

Yet, as a writer, Aboulela has to draw from those synaptic, connective tissues between the past and the present and what this does in helping her frame possible futures in her fiction. In fact, in both *The Translator* and *Minaret*, she traverses the past through the soft spaces of memory and dream, at times blurring the boundaries between the two, but always showing how dependent they are on each other and how reliant she is, as a writer, on her past and that of her country, the Sudan. Aboulela's novels confirm that there is no blanket migration narrative, no homogeneous African migration narrative, since migration stories differ. Writers construct various and varied stories, from narratives of nostalgic longing to narratives of the quest for belonging, often emphasizing that pull between "home" and "away." Some focus on the journey, physical and metaphysical. There is no set formula for writing the migration narrative; no single or simple way to read it.

Notes

1. Amin Malak, *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English* (New York: SUNY Press, 2005), 3.
2. Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift, eds., *Mapping the Subject: Geographies of Cultural Transformation* (London: Routledge, 1995), 380.
3. James Procter, *Dwelling Places: Postwar Black British Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 15.
4. Leila Aboulela, *Minaret* (New York: Black Cat, 2005), 275.
5. Pile and Thrift, *Mapping the Subject*, 1.
6. *Ibid.*, 13.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Eric Bulson, *Novels, Maps, Modernity: The Spatial Imagination, 1850–2000* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 19.
9. *Ibid.*
10. James Procter, "Leila Aboulela: Critical Perspective," British Council Literature, <https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/leila-aboulela>; emphasis added.
11. Cecelia Scopetta, "Synaptic Spaces of Europe: A Challenge for Spatial Planning," *Social Sciences* 3, nos. 4–1 (July 2014): 48.
12. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 115.
13. Bulson, *Novels, Maps, Modernity*, 17
14. Leila Aboulela, *The Translator* (Oxford: Heinemann, 2001), 3.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*

17. Ibid., 3–4.
18. Ibid., 5.
19. Ibid., 109.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 127.
23. Ibid., 128.
24. Renata Pepicelli, “Islam and Women’s Literature in Europe: Reading Leila Aboulela and Ingy Mubiayi,” *Jura Gentium* 8, no. 2 (2011): 82.
25. Aboulela, *The Translator*, 130.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., 131.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., 131–32.
31. Aboulela, *Minaret*, 1.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid., 91.
35. Procter, *Dwelling Places*, 15.
36. Ibid.
37. Aboulela, *Minaret*, 79.
38. Ibid., 184.
39. Ibid., 275.
40. Aboulela, *The Translator*, 146.
41. Aboulela, *Minaret*, 1.
42. I prefer *womanist* in this instance because it fittingly accommodates the work and lives of black women or women of color who have been absent from the politics and poetics of much Euro-American feminist thinking and action.
43. Saleh Eissa, “Interview with Leila Aboulela,” *The i Witness*, July 2005, 19, www.iwitness.co.uk/features/0705fe03.htm.
44. Anitha Sethi, “Keep the Faith: Interview with Leila Aboulela,” *Observer*, June 5, 2005.
45. Ibid.
46. Tina Steiner, “Strategic Nostalgia, Islam and Cultural Translation in Leila Aboulela’s *The Translator* and *Coloured Lights*,” *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 20, no. 2 (July 2008): 8.

Waris Dirie, FGM, and the Authentic Voice

John C. Hawley

The village reminded me of the tortoise. It draws its head and arms and legs deep into its shell and refuses to acknowledge you even if you poke it with a stick.

—Waris Dirie, *Desert Dawn*¹

Finding a Voice

In making a claim for women's agency within the academy, Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz writes, "those feminist authors who most successfully argue from a personal point of view are typically making a simultaneous claim that their lives are revealing about some larger, if not universal, truths."² Her examples are principally women of color, and she goes on to argue that "feminism, then, has opened up the space for the personal voice in scholarship; it has also pushed white feminists, in particular, to get beyond focusing on asserted similarities between women, to change our courses and our research to reflect the diversity of women's experiences."³ Chilla Bulbeck, for example, suggests that "Feminists who resist orientalism . . . wish to put the means of recourse into the hands of women, but not white women. We seek to abjure dichotomies that divide 'us' and 'them' into incommensurable categories; we wish to avoid maternalism and speaking 'for' other women," because to do so would confirm a stereotype of them as simply passive victims.⁴

At the same time, in important anthologies, like Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* and Teresa de Lauretis's *Feminist Studies, Critical Studies*, the special demands made by readers of autobiographies written by women are laid bare and, in many cases, offered as examples not only of an unequal playing field but also, perhaps more productively, as occasions for a redefinition of the genre. Writing in 1986, Nancy

K. Miller asks, “On what grounds can we remodel the relations of a female subject to the social text?” and she responds that “future feminist intervention requires an ironic manipulation of the semiotics of performance and production.”⁵ In this chapter, I would like to suggest that such “manipulation” can take unexpected and challenging forms when enacted by an African woman who has migrated from her community of birth, and that the challenge is not only to men. Such hermeneutical conundrums move beyond issues of gender to those of race and class, especially when the autobiographer is not a Westerner, and when she is writing about the country of her birth but doing so beyond the borders of that country.

Writing just a few years before the outrage over the “dishonesty” of Guatemalan activist Rigoberta Menchú’s *testimonio*,⁶ Nancy K. Miller describes the pact between authors of autobiographical works and their readers, and what she called the “truth effect” of such writing. “The truth claim of autobiography,” she writes, is “nothing more (*but no less*) than its recorded desire . . . to be taken by others as a kind of truth.”⁷ The reader recognizes an autobiographical work is not a verbatim or documentary, but is instead a “kind of truth,” a series of remembrances filtered through a specific individual’s set of emotional memories, a narrative, therefore, that shares the creative impulses and teleological imperatives of fiction.

When can a writer of such works legitimately claim to speak for an entire class of people, or allow himself or herself to be so represented? In the case of writers from the developing world and, more specifically, the Islamic world or a whole continent like Africa, one must use caution in casually identifying someone as a “native informant”:⁸ no single person can possibly sum up the full range of experience of her gender or place of origin—nor even, of course, of her own life, evidenced by the fact that some authors write multiple versions of their autobiographies. As Leigh Gilmore notes, “the *I* is multiply coded in a range of discourses: it is the site of multiple solicitations, multiple markings of ‘identity,’ multiple figurations of agency.”⁹ But some voices become singularly notable, if for no other reason than because they have attained unique access to a worldwide audience. Readers do well to remain critical if such agents become vocal proponents for a contentious cause, lest such advocacy involve the compromising of the agent’s principles for personal gain.

In this chapter I would like to consider whether or not Waris Dirie is one such person, a writer whose individual experiences have attained a synecdochal resonance that occasions her “use” by elements of society (and, crucially, by *which* society—European or Somali?) as a representation of a larger injustice: a serious physical assault on the bodies of unsuspecting children, and a subsequent silencing of mature protest against the practice. Whether this is a manipulation, mutual or otherwise, or whether there is anything ironic in that engagement, remains to be seen in what follows. As a migrant from Africa living in Europe, does she have access to the “multiply coded” self across the range of discourses she wishes to engage? At the same time, despite the resemblance with various other African autobiographies, Dirie’s is remarkably

idiosyncratic, hardly fulfilling James Olney's contention that the African autobiographer recounts a *group* life story: "one lived countless times before, shaped by the ritual stages of birth, naming, initiation, marriage, parenthood, eldership, and death that have given form to the life of the people for as far back as the legendary, mythic memory of the people extends."¹⁰ On one hand, there is the potential for Dirie to become a self-conscious advocate for a group of individuals that numbers in the millions; on the other hand, there is the danger of an essentializing view that reduces her remarkable life to a type by negating her subjectivity and, in the process, objectifying her as totally as any fashion photographer over the years.

UN Special Ambassador from 1997 to 2003, Waris Dirie was born to a family of tribal nomads in Somalia in 1965. She tells her story—enduring female circumcision at the age of five, fleeing through the desert, and, remarkably, becoming a top model for Revlon cosmetics, etc.—in her first book, *Desert Flower*. In her second book, *Desert Dawn*, she writes about her return to Somalia and her work as a UN Special Ambassador against female genital mutilation (FGM); some prefer the term *female circumcision*, or simply *female cutting*). Her third book in the trilogy, *Desert Children*, recounts her investigations into the practice of FGM in Europe, where it is estimated that as many as five hundred thousand women and girls have undergone FGM or are at risk. She includes in the third book voices of women who have felt emboldened by her own courage to risk community rejection and further physical attacks.

Memory, self-creation, and allowing oneself to find a voice are central to Dirie's autobiographical work, writing as she does from a position of transplantation from the country of her youth. In reading her work, I seek to engage with diaspora studies and the emerging field of celebrity studies to interrogate the semipermanent African condition of migrancy for those like her who criticize the politics of their homelands. Such transportation from home raises questions about the position from which these individuals speak, and conflicting emotions are strongly invoked in such discussions. Wole Soyinka, in response to concerns about the brain drain from Africa to Europe and elsewhere, wrote, "the brains of their stay-at-home colleagues will be found as grisly sediments on the riverbed of the Nile. Or in the stomach linings of African crocodiles and vultures."¹¹ Migrancy, in other words, is generally a life-or-death choice. But the question persists: for whom do such expatriates really speak, and for how long must they seek an audience abroad, or a safe place from which to be heard in their native lands?

At the age of five, along with her two sisters, Dirie underwent pharaonic circumcision, which consists of "the removal of the clitoris, the adjacent labia (majora and minora), and the joining of the scraped sides of the vulva across the vagina, where they are secured with thorns or sewn with catgut or thread. A small opening is kept to allow passage of urine and menstrual blood. An infibulated woman must be cut open to allow intercourse on the wedding night."¹² Several years later, at the age of thirteen, she learned that her father had planned an arranged marriage for her to a much older man. She ran away to

Mogadishu and lived with one of her older sisters. She soon moved to London and worked as a servant for her uncle, who was the Somali ambassador. When his term in office was over, Dirie remained in the city, cleaning floors at a local McDonald's and learning English at night. In telling her story, Dirie gives the impression that her mother, from whom she got her beauty, had been a rebel in her own family—a family of sophisticated and educated urbanites living in Mogadishu. It was against the family's best advice that Dirie's mother married a nomad and moved to the desert. Though a feminist might see this choice as unfortunate, Dirie apparently drew strength from it when it came time to choose her own fate, in opposition to the will of her own father. She later tells her brother's wife: "Sister, I was born here. I was raised right here just like you. I learned a lot of things here, like confidence. I also learned to be self-reliant. I don't sit around and wait for somebody else to do something—I get up and do it. That's what I learned here."¹³ In a sense, she had already seen her mother choose to be an internal migrant and move farther *into* Somalia.

Her modeling career began in 1987, when Terence Donovan photographed her for the cover of that year's Pirelli Calendar. She soon worked for Revlon, L'Oréal, Levi's, and Chanel, appeared in a James Bond movie, and became an international runway model. She appeared in many fashion magazines, and her career was documented by the BBC in 1995 in a film entitled *A Nomad in New York*.

At the height of her professional career, though, in 1997 she began her work against FGM and stopped modeling. As she matured and grew in self-confidence, a new vocation had presented itself: "Sometimes great pain is a great gift and I believe that Allah had given me a gift. I knew now where to start with my campaign to eliminate female genital mutilation. Women had to be educated about sex. Men needed to know about women's bodies as well as their own."¹⁴ She was named by the United Nations as a Special Ambassador for the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation, and since then she has received many prizes and awards for her humanitarian work and books, including the Woman of the Year Award (2000) by *Glamour* magazine, Women's World Award (2004), the Bishop Oscar Romero Award (2005), the Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur (2007), the Martin Buber Gold Medal (2008), and the Gold Medal of the President of the Republic of Italy (2010). In 2010, the African Union appointed her Peace Ambassador for the Year of Peace and Security. For the purposes of this chapter, I think it is helpful to enumerate these to suggest that she has met with many more accolades in Europe and the United States than in Africa—and to ask why that may be the case.

It is easy to understand how involvement in the cause she has undertaken would overtake one's life: it is huge and ongoing. Most of the countries in which FGM takes place have predominantly Muslim populations, but most people these days note that some Christians in several of those countries also practice the procedure; others argue that the procedure is not Islamic, or that the Quranic teaching on the matter is vague.¹⁵ The very term *pharaonic* suggests the pre-Islamic history of FGM. Dirie and others have pointed out that

“FGM as a phenomenon pre-dates Islam,” and that the prophet did not have his own daughters circumcised.¹⁶ The practice has been roundly condemned in many quarters and is now illegal in twenty-three African nations. Nonetheless, it continues to be performed, according to the World Health Organization, on approximately six thousand girls each day, and has been performed on over 140 million women alive today in over thirty countries around the world.¹⁷ In 1992, three attorneys—Jessica Neuwirth in the United States, Navanethem Pillay in South Africa, and Feryal Gharahi in Iran—founded Equality Now¹⁸ to publicize the issue and change laws throughout the world; in 2000 they opened an African regional office in Nairobi. Much has been written to protest FGM, including the 2009 collection edited by Tobe Levin and Augustine H. Asaah, which includes essays by African writers, and discusses the history of its portrayal in African literature. In the titles of her admirable studies of this topic, Chantal Zabus makes reference to these “haunting wounds” in her explorations of “what the body remembers.” While a few doctors have successfully reversed the procedure, the psychological trauma remains even for individuals who have access to such physicians.¹⁹ In *Desert Dawn*, Dirie alludes to “Sunni circumcision, which involves no actual cutting and sewing, and is instead just a ritual. Apparently,” she writes, “some modern women in Saudi Arabia have taken this up as an alternative.”²⁰

Seeking an Audience

In an early study of a developing trope in African novels (and, more generally, all postcolonial fiction), William Lawson discussed the “been-to” protagonist: such individuals, he notes, typically go to London or Paris for an education, and then return home with a new, more critical eye: “The been-to typically is conscious of a massive breakdown of human institutions in his country. Bereft of the sustaining power of a felt moral universe, he sees how falsity and cynicism have replaced belief and commitment. He sees Westernization as a curse on his world . . . devoid of spiritual value [and] functioning in his community as an agent of disorder.”²¹ The deracinated character is caught between the two worlds, and wanders tragically without a clear sense of purpose. But there are occasional exceptions: Wole Soyinka’s Ofeyi, the protagonist in *Season of Anomy*, “is not a divided man [and] does not suffer any confusion of identity. His Western education has not caused him any deep trauma.”²² Nonetheless, he returns with a sharper critical eye and a louder voice.

It had been over twenty years before Dirie returned to Somalia and found her family, and there can be no doubt she had changed during those years in New York while in the public eye. Having achieved fame in Western terms for her beauty, she soon wished to be recognized on that stage as someone of substance, someone who was more than a clotheshorse, and someone, in fact, who came from a particular place. But she was canny enough to understand that the majority of Westerners blurred all of Africa into one dimly imagined continent

of misery, and that contemporary Somalia would be as opaque to them as the Congo had been to Joseph Conrad's readers a century before. Her books have been addressed to that ignorance in the West, rather than to countrymen and women on the African continent. But because of the personal nature of her particular involvement in FGM, her exilic yearning would be drawn to quite another audience as well, and to its own reluctance to see beyond the familiar customs that had seemingly served its society well for many generations. This African audience has proven itself to be intransigent on many levels, but she sees signs of change.

The resistance to change is understandable. Whatever the contentious term *postcolonial* might mean, we can perhaps agree that Africa is postcolonial in the limited sense that nineteenth-century colonies have achieved technical independence from the European powers that used them for national enrichment. Obviously, those enriched nations still hold sway over world commodity markets, and thus maintain economic dominance over their former African colonies, regardless of the technical legal changes. Citizens of the African nations grow up in that condition and quickly learn their national histories and the causes for their ongoing problems, especially as those are maintained to the advantage of European, American, and now Chinese powers. One result is a sensitivity to dictates, moral or otherwise, from these former masters. These reactions can seem wrongheaded to those in the West confident that they have the high ground in the advocacy of what they describe as human rights.

Thus, Frantz Fanon famously defended the use of the veil by women in Algeria against the wishes of the French. The veil, he wrote, was "worn because tradition demanded a rigid separation of the sexes, but also because the occupier was bent on unveiling Algeria . . . [so that] what is in fact the assertion of a distinct identity, concern with keeping intact a few shreds of national existence, is attributed to religious, magical, fanatical behavior."²³ The French saw maintenance of the veil as a medieval and barbaric practice; Fanon argues that it is a small assertion of national identity, pushing back against French cultural hegemony. By Fanon's logic, maintaining the veil is an understandable and even desirable precondition for the stabilizing of national identity.

Sometimes such postcolonial defenses can appear to Western readers as obfuscatory and counterproductive to a particular cause that might better be approached with one voice. On the matter of FGM, Egyptian novelist Nawal El Saadawi writes that "Sigmund Freud promoted psychological circumcision of women when he formulated his theory that maturity and mental health in a woman required that orgasm related to the clitoris cease and be transferred to the vagina." In el Saadawi's view, Freud's symbolic "abolition of the functions of the clitoris is equal to its absence. It might even be considered more malicious, because it produces the illusion of being complete, whereas the body has lost an essential organ."²⁴ But describing Freud's repositioning of the female orgasm as being so wrongheaded that he is committing an act of female subjugation equal to cliterodectomy and as even *more* malicious will impress some as quite odd, especially coming from a feminist physician and psychiatrist: the

bodies in question for Freud have not literally “lost an essential organ,” since there is quite a difference between symbolic removal and the actual act of cutting. So there would seem to be other issues at work in el Saadawi’s positioning. Eloise A. Brière is less subtle in her analysis (but closer to the emotional heart of the reaction in some African circles) when she writes, “focusing on genital mutilation enables the West to view itself in a positive light.”²⁵

And so, in the case at hand: Waris Dirie and her reception among some Africans will surprise those who hold her in high regard. In asking what it is that Waris Dirie represents in our globalized world, related issues hound the discussion, including the very notion of representation—i.e., for whom is Dirie speaking, and to whom, and how is she interpreted by her various audiences? To what extent is she being used by others, and to what ends? This points to the question of agency, the complex and ambivalent role of so-called native informants, the implications of personal transformations wrought upon diasporic migrants, and the scripts they are allowed to speak in countries beyond their homelands. Like Rigoberta Menchú, Waris Dirie wrote her books with the help of Western-trained amanuenses (Cathleen Miller, Jeanne D’Haem, and Corinna Milborn), suggesting, as Zabrus notes, autobiographers who are “caught between impulses toward exposure and concealment.”²⁶ In the specific case of Waris Dirie and the cause with which she has become identified, one is led inescapably to the tensions between the interventionists and the cultural relativists—i.e., as Obioma Nnaemeka puts it, summarizing Vicki Kirby, between “those who argue that female circumcision is an ‘unspeakable’ act so heinous that it demands intervention, and on the other hand, the cultural relativists.”²⁷

In Obioma Nnaemeka’s collection of essays—a collection by authors who preface their remarks by underscoring that they all condemn the practice of female circumcision²⁸—Chima Korieh writes helpfully—provocatively but, overall, in a balanced way—about Western feminism, race, and representation in female circumcision discourse. But near the end of his essay, he turns his attention to Dirie, almost as an after-thought, in a highly insulting and reductive way. Referring to the interview Dirie gave to Barbara Walters on the television program *20/20* in 1997, Korieh writes:

It is important to get the perspective of someone who has experienced female circumcision, but in this particular interview, all the questions Dirie answered were leading questions, requiring a yes answer, affirming the ‘cruelty’ of female circumcision. Dirie’s only credential is that she is a successful model and was circumcised as a teenager [wrong: 5 years old]. As I read the transcript of this interview with amazement I could not help but conclude that Dirie is just being used as a propaganda tool as she does not show that she has a grip on the complex web of critical issues involved in the female circumcision debate. Needless to say that we are not presented a counter perspective, an error of which Western feminists, media, and other agencies are guilty.²⁹

Korieh began his essay by accepting that the “deleterious health consequences of certain female circumcision practices cannot be overemphasized,”³⁰ and he protests that he has *not* proposed “a relativist position wherein female circumcision . . . is legitimized within its cultural context.”³¹ So it would seem that it is not the content of the message from diasporic critics like Dirie that draws Korieh’s ire, but the messenger herself. The main body of his paper protests against “feminist discourses that position the West as the arbiter of cultural values and meanings,” and against “the salvationist agenda of Western feminism and its mission of speaking across differences of race, gender, sexuality, and cultures.”³²

But Waris Dirie is as much an African as are any of her African critics, even though she may be an unwelcome trailblazer—a prophet without honor in her own town (at one point she complains that she felt like she was “the local comedy act”).³³ One is reminded of the vague criticism brought against Buchi Emecheta and Ben Okri when their writing styles evolved after many years living away from Nigeria in London. Chinedu Ogoke, for example, argues that “a lot of discomfort in African literary circles” has been caused by Okri’s embrace of magical realism, which Ogoke attributes to “the unhealthy impact of exile in a writer’s life.”³⁴ This change in the expected African way of writing, he says, is “worrisome” and a sign of “a collective literary suicide.”³⁵ If this highly emotional critique can be made so confidently against established novelists, one should not be surprised at the outrage expressed when a comparatively unschooled author like Dirie dares to speak up against an entrenched cultural practice. Change is difficult, and those in socially sanctioned positions of cultural authority often resist challenges to their hermeneutical framework.

For the sake of argument, let us grant that Dirie has been used by capitalists as a propaganda tool—she was, after all, a supermodel and the spokesperson for Revlon cosmetics, and one might suggest that she entered with enthusiasm into the “staging of [her] exoticism for a Western audience,” as Zabrus puts it,³⁶ showing up at one of her first photo shoots having bleached her hair blonde. To be fair, she was young and had only recently noticed that “the thought that for the first time in my history, I was in charge of my own life was intoxicating,”³⁷ and “being blond was something I wanted to try for *me* and I thought it looked bloody fabulous.”³⁸ But implying that her critique of FGM is somehow delegitimized by her work in the fashion industry is misguided: if her cause is just, why attack the messenger? Why would an author critical of Dirie feel the need to overstate his or her case by questioning her credentials? Why must a *counterperspective* be demanded of a speaker whose “only credential,” we are told, is that she was circumcised as a child? Whose voice can be accepted as authentic with regard to this particular issue, one wonders, if not Dirie’s? And are others, still immersed in a culture that accepts FGM as a necessary rite of passage for young women, better situated to speak on this issue? As Dirie herself puts it, “I wanted the people who promote this torture to hear what it feels like from at least one woman, because all the females in my country are silenced.”³⁹

As we have noted, Korieh stipulates that he does not hold “a relativist position wherein female circumcision . . . is legitimized within its cultural context,”⁴⁰ but he condemns Barbara Walters and Hugh Downs, the moderators of the 20/20 interview, for describing the practice as “barbaric.” Moving beyond the sting of the insult, one might ask if the term is nonetheless accurate, and would he have found it less offensive if an African rather than a Western newscaster had used such an adjective to describe the procedure. Fixating on what they describe as the West’s tendency to construct itself “as a site of moral superiority”⁴¹—and, no doubt, it does so in this case—perhaps such critics are speaking from a postcolonial condition: not yet ready to jump outside that binary to join forces with those in the West who are being so aggressive in their attack on a cultural practice, even if they acknowledge, as they do, the problematic nature of the practice itself. The attack is really aimed at the West, though the tactic employed would seem to be trivializing the expatriate African messenger.

One assumes Korieh is offering Western readers a taste of their own medicine when he wonders, “which procedure is more morally shocking, female circumcision or partial-birth abortion and forced sterilization practiced in many Western societies.”⁴² One could ask why any such comparison need be made if Korieh has already admitted the injustice of female circumcision. Partial-birth abortion and forced sterilization are other ethical issues in their own right and, to be fair, are controversial in the West as well. Korieh asks, “If women in the West have a right to express their sexuality and are pro-choice, why should other women not have the right to express their sexuality in ways they deem appropriate?”⁴³ But the point that women like Dirie are making is that most women who undergo female circumcision do not have a choice in the matter—indeed, they are almost always victimized before they are capable of making any meaningful choices on this scale, and have every reason to trust the decisions made for them by their parents. The female members of their own family, after all, often carry out the procedure. Where, in such situations, is “the right to express their sexuality”?

Korieh and others seem, in fact, to be willfully, bewilderingly complicating the issue, and framing the complication in an apparent outcry on behalf of greater cultural understanding. “In their fight to ‘eradicate’ female circumcision,” Korieh writes, “Western feminists and development agencies have over sensationalized the issue by making it seem as if they are dealing with a plague instead of with peoples, societies, cultures, and values.”⁴⁴ Countering this, Dirie casts this “over sensationalized” issue in terms of patriarchal tyranny, writing that “for over four thousand years African cultures have mutilated their women.”⁴⁵ Dirie further writes,

Tribal wars, like the practice of circumcision, are brought about by the ego, selfishness, and aggression of men . . . Both acts stem from their obsession with their territory—their possessions—and women fall into that category both culturally and legally. Perhaps if we cut their balls off, my country would become paradise. The men would calm down and be

more sensitive to the world. Without that constant surge of testosterone, there'd be no war, no killing, no thieving, no rape. And if they chopped off their private parts, and turned them loose to run around and either bleed to death or survive, maybe they could understand for the first time what they're doing to their women.⁴⁶

Perhaps it is this unapologetic voice that Korieh and others find unacceptable about Dirie. Is there any real need for Dirie to first couch such criticism in a paean to a cultural practice that has silenced millions of girls since the time of the pharaohs?

The question of authenticity always comes to the fore in instances of cultural critique brought against an individual's native country when that individual returns from many years in self-imposed exile. Who are *they* to speak when they have not "walked the walk"? The defense is well put by two Afro-Caribbean scholars, J. B. Fournillier and T. Lewis, who argue as follows:

Our Afro Caribbean-ness will always be with us. But by transforming our relations with the world and with others, our identities as social beings are affected. We recognize that it is not our naivety but our conscious awareness of the social, cultural, historical and intellectual frames [that] contribute to the ways in which we co-construct our notions of authenticity/in-authenticity. . . . It therefore seems most appropriate to conclude with the words of [Paulo] Freire and [A. M. Araujo] Friere . . . 'It is imperative that we maintain hope even when the harshness of reality may suggest the opposite. On this level, the struggle for hope means denunciation, in no uncertain terms, of all abuses, schemes, and omissions. As we denounce them, we awaken in others and ourselves the need, and also the taste for hope.'⁴⁷

Fournillier and Lewis are straightforward: romantic nativism offers only a false blindness or escape from responsibility.

But it is not only a Western audience that Dirie seeks. In her second book, *Desert Dawn*, a mature Waris returns to visit her family, and like many "been-to" figures she has trouble finding a common language. She tries to tell them about a time when she was just a child, and a friend of her father's took her out into the desert and molested her—but she finds that she cannot speak. It is as though she has quickly remembered what a taboo the topic is in her native culture: "Mama patted my leg with a worried face. She kept looking into my eyes to read their secrets and what she saw troubled her, but she wouldn't ask—we don't talk about such things. If you aren't allowed to talk about sex, you better sew the girls shut because then, like me, they won't know what is happening to them."⁴⁸ One might ask whether or not she has really escaped a role of voiceless subaltern. Has she found a way to use her own country, Somalia, as an entry point into the globality of the present? If she seeks with great frustration to drag her country kicking and screaming into the larger global world, has

she in the process so rejected the culture from which she ran in terror that she has, as Chima Korieh would seem to suggest, become a co-opted mouthpiece for Western feminism, another victim of “epistemological imperialism”⁴⁹ who chooses to “represent” her culture in the sensationalized terms presented by her new masters? At one point of particular frustration, she condemns “the ignorant bush mentality” that she says is keeping her country down,⁵⁰ and in her third volume, about the practice of FGM in Europe, she describes the practice as “not culture, but torture.”⁵¹

Writing in the same volume to which Korieh contributes, Vicki Kirby puts this question squarely: “Questions about African women using the peculiar taxonomy that has come to organize Western genital pleasures may be the inadvertent projection of ethnocentric assumptions” on the part of Western critics of FGM.⁵² Kirby quotes a female Egyptian physician who, while being personally against FGM, chooses to be “much more circumspect about intervention despite her own commitments.” She quotes the doctor as saying, “I originally came from the countryside, . . . but all my life I have lived in Cairo. I can’t assume that I have the right to talk about women in the countryside. . . . So how can you decide for us, so far away?”⁵³ Kirby endorses the physician’s approach, advising Western readers (and, perhaps, everyone except those living “in the countryside”?) that “although the use of different methods and approaches could secure a much better fit in the reading of these cultures, there will always remain a ‘certain something’ that continues to escape the reader’s template.”⁵⁴

Like many individuals who return home after many years, and after having achieved a certain success in the world’s eyes, Dirie is surprised and bemused by the way her family initially views her: as the little girl they once knew, someone without any real presence or substance. She may have graced the covers of fashion magazines, but what is that to a family of nomadic people? In any case, Dirie seems to understand the cultural imperatives that led her family to mutilate her genitals. In *Desert Dawn*, a book about her return trip to Somalia after her career as a model, she writes, “My family’s intention was not to harm me; it was something my mother and her sisters and her mother went through themselves. They honestly felt it had to be done in order for me to be pure. . . . Nobody could read the Koran or the Hadith—my mother listened to the sheiks, she didn’t question what she was told.”⁵⁵ There are many beautiful passages in the second volume that show how deeply she loves her native culture, despite her years abroad and her very real critique of Somalia’s limitations. “Most people in the West have so many things they don’t even know what they have,” she writes. “My parents could probably count every single thing they owned, and food was difficult to get, yet they were cheerful and happy. People on the street were smiling and talking to each other. I think that Western people are trying to fill themselves up with something that is missing. Everybody there is searching. They search in the stores and on the television.”⁵⁶ And though she has been schooled in the fine points of Western cosmetics, she still knows where real beauty lies: “The important things are your family,” she writes, “your stories, and your animals. . . . Real beauty is not something you see in a mirror

or on the cover of a magazine; it's the way that you live your life."⁵⁷ And she is pleased that her mother recognizes her as the girl she had raised, noting that "even though we had a little fight, she could see that I valued her ways, and the things she taught me. I didn't forget the important things because I lived in a different place."⁵⁸

But as a result of her migration to London, she has been "Westernized," to be sure. Near the end of her return visit to Somalia, she stands back from her experiences of that eventful week, and muses as follows: "I noticed that an old rooster was strutting around the schoolyard and crowing like he was the one in charge. He pecked importantly at the ground looking for a seed in the dust. I don't think anybody else noticed him and I feel that way about my country. People in the West don't notice my poor little country."⁵⁹ She is without question speaking here as a feminist and from a position of alienation, but at the same time there is an undeniable sense of melancholy: "there is no feeling like home," she writes. "Oh how I missed that feeling of belonging to something much greater than myself. I regretted that I hadn't been there for so many years. I had not seen my people age and grow old. I had not been there when they needed me."⁶⁰ She had always been a rebellious child, and though she had always done what she had been told, she had also always been irked not to be given a reason to do so. She obviously loves her mother, but writes,

she would never answer my questions, or give me any reasons. . . . That is the way things are in Somalia. When I was a girl I didn't like it; now that I had lived in the West, I hated it. I respected my culture, but I wanted to look my father in the eyes. I knew that he would never look away from me—he would expect me to look down, to demonstrate my respect for him. I was not going to do that! I was going to look right at him, stare at him, and hold his gaze with my eyes. He would see me, Waris, the daughter he sold to an old man for a few camels who now earned her own money. He would have to look at the girl he never sent to school who became a writer. The girl who was a United Nations special ambassador for women's rights.⁶¹

Her return visit to Somalia, recorded in *Desert Dawn*, was successful up to a limited degree: she was reunited with her family and they were more or less reconciled to allowing each other to live their lives as they chose. But her larger purpose was a complete failure. As she tells another woman, "I wasn't able to get a single person in my village to talk about this with me. Not one person! They all looked at me like I was crazy."⁶² Big changes, of course, take time. In Dirie's sixth book, *Saving Safa*, the painstaking labor is very evident, but so, too, is the gradual movement toward progress on this issue: Dirie's mother asks her to take her niece and protect her from the practice of FGM.

With African critics like those who accuse Dirie of naiveté or complicity with neocolonialists, and with a fully entrenched patriarchy, is it any wonder that diasporic African women wait until they are abroad before they let the

world know what they really think, even if this positions them as echoing Western feminists? Kirby records that among a group of sixty circumcised Somali women, twenty-five said they enjoyed intercourse with their husbands (even though circumcised) and five others couldn't describe what they felt.⁶³ She does not record what the other half of her sample said about their experience. Dirie has claimed that her countrywomen are "silenced," and one wonders if her opinion would hold any water with Kirby and others, who suggest that "any attempt to explain [the circumcised Somali women's assertion] as false consciousness or simple ignorance turns the difference between women and between cultures into a nonsense that the West alone can explain."⁶⁴

What is needed, it would seem, is the sort of feminist cultural hermeneutic that theologian Musimbi Kanyoro developed for her work with older Christian women in her village in Kenya. In noting that "if change were to be viable for anything, it must address first and foremost, cultural issues,"⁶⁵ she observes that "African cultures have more similarities with the cultures of ancient biblical times than with contemporary Western, secularized cultures."⁶⁶ Thus, they "hold the Bible in awe as the word of God written directly to them," and when they read the Bible, "they read and hear the message as if it were written specifically for them. They do not dwell on the text as somebody else's text to be read and analyzed, but rather they see the purpose of the text as providing them with a framework to look at their own lives. They immediately appropriate the text and situate themselves inside of it."⁶⁷ As she points out, the cultural dissonance is obvious in encounters with "those cultures that are far removed from biblical culture [who] risk reading the Bible as fiction."⁶⁸ She sat with these women and read the Book of Ruth, and found they came to quite different conclusions than she had done. "Here," she writes, "I was hearing women affirm and justify a reading of the text of Ruth that has potential harm to women and girls. It was reasoned that because such a reading enhanced our culture, then it was good for us."⁶⁹ What she tried to do was not to pursue her own solutions but rather to develop a relationship that, she writes, "enables us to continue discussing these issues of life and death *in our village*."⁷⁰

Such cultural hermeneutics may be what is needed in the West's encounter with FGM as well—and this is surely the impulse running through Obioma Nnaemeka's fiery collection of essays: rather than criticizing from outside, ways might be found for entering the cultures in question, seeking to find a common language and mutually recognizable tools, and painstakingly building a larger house with more windows onto other worlds. Ange-Marie Hancock underscores that the respect must be mutual: on one hand, "African feminisms proceed beyond deconstructive efforts to respond to Western feminist discourse," and on the other hand, non-African women need to contend with "African women as possessing varying degrees of control over their lives, which can increase via egalitarian multicultural coalitions."⁷¹

At the same time, as Elisabeth Bekers suggests, it is the next generation—that of Dirie's daughters, the second-generation migrants—that is likely to build an archive of "the complexities of the migration of female genital

excision to the West.”⁷² But Dirie’s work underscores that men, at least as much as women, need to be educated so that the practice will lose its hold on their imaginations. Perhaps in our digital age this may come about more quickly than one might have suspected, but Dirie has no false hopes. At the end of a long day trying to intervene and prevent the circumcision of a Somali girl living in Europe, she writes, “Yes, I tell myself. It is worth fighting for all these girls and women. From them I get the strength I need to carry on. This journey is far from over.”⁷³ She is correct to see it as a journey, one that has carried her far beyond the desert so familiar to her as a child. Though by now Waris Dirie is a citizen of the world, she is at heart a Somali woman.

Notes

1. Waris Dirie, *Desert Dawn* (London: Virago, 2002), 115.
2. Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, “Personal Voice / Feminist Voice,” *Arethusa* 34, no. 2 (2001): 197.
3. *Ibid.*, 200.
4. Chilla Bulbeck, “(White) Feminism and Foreigners: My Quest for Connection,” *Australian Feminist Studies* 25, no. 66 (2010): 495–96.
5. Nancy K. Miller, “Changing the Subject: Authorship, Writing, and the Reader,” in *Feminist Studies, Critical Studies*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 115–16.
6. On the Menchú controversy, see David Stoll, *I, Rigoberta Menchu and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999); Greg Grandin, “Rigoberta Menchú Vindicated,” *Nation*, January 21, 2015, <https://www.thenation.com/article/rigoberta-menchu-vindicated/>; David Horowitz, “I, Rigoberta Menchu, Liar,” *FrontPageMagazine.com*, February 26, 1999, <http://archive.frontpagemag.com/readArticle.aspx?ARTID=24278>; and John Beverly, “The Margin at the Center: On *Testimonio* (Testimonial Narrative),” *Modern Fiction Studies* 35, no. 1 (1989): 11–28.
7. Miller, “Changing the Subject,” 12.
8. Gayatri Spivak, “Questions on Multiculturalism,” in *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, and Dialogues*, ed. Sarah Harasym (New York: Routledge, 1990), 66.
9. Leigh Gilmore, “Autobiographics,” in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 184.
10. James Olney, “The Value of Autobiography for Comparative Studies: African vs. Western Autobiography,” in *African American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. William L. Andrews (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1993), 218.
11. Wole Soyinka, “Twice Bitten: The Fate of Africa’s Culture Producers,” *PMLA* 105, no. 1 (1990): 112.

12. The Female Genital Cutting Education and Networking Project, <http://www.fgmnetwork.org/index.php>.

13. Dirie, *Desert Dawn*, 164.

14. *Ibid.*, 166.

15. See, for example: "The Truth about Islam and Female Circumcision," in *Inside Islam: Dialogues and Debates*, February 18, 2011, <http://insideislam.wisc.edu/2011/02/the-truth-about-islam-and-female-circumcision/>. See also Thomas von der Osten-Sacken and Thomas Uwer, "Is Female Genital Mutilation an Islamic Problem?" *The Middle East Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (2007): 29–36.

16. Waris Dirie, *Desert Children* (London: Virago, 2005), 175.

17. World Health Organization Media Centre, "Female Genital Mutilation," updated February 2016, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/>.

18. See *Equality Now*, <http://www.equalitynow.org/>.

19. Dr. Marci Bowers, for example, is a surgeon in San Mateo, California, who is transgender; she has performed over one hundred defibulations and cliteroplasties. Her story is told in "Reversing Female Circumcision: The Cut that Heals," *Vice News*, February 7, 2015, <https://news.vice.com/video/reversing-female-circumcision-the-cut-that-heals>.

20. Dirie, *Desert Dawn*, 223.

21. William Lawson, *The Western Scar: The Theme of the Been-to in West African Fiction* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1982), 3.

22. Wole Soyinka, *Season of Anomy* (London: Arena Books, 1988).

23. Frantz Fanon, "Algeria Unveiled," in *Decolonization: Perspectives from Now and Then*, ed. Prasenjit Duara (London: Routledge, 2004), 46, 55. See also Peter Racco, "The Dynamism of the Veil: Veiling and Unveiling as a Means of Creating Identity in Algeria and France," *The Undergraduate Historical Journal at UC Merced* 1, no. 1 (2014), <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/62w625wh> item/62w625wh#page-1.

24. Obioma Nnaemeka, ed., *Female Circumcision and the Politics of Knowledge: African Women in Imperialist Discourses* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), 22.

25. *Ibid.*, 7.

26. Chantal Zabus. "Acquiring Body: Waris Dirie, Infibulation, and New African Female Self-Writing," *Africa and Its Significant Others: Forty Years of Intercultural Entanglement*, special issue in honor of Mineke Schipper, ed. Isabelle Hoving, Frans-Willem Korsten, and Ernst van Alphen, *Thamyris/Intersecting* 11 (2003): 64.

27. Nnaemeka, *Female Circumcision*, 6.

28. *Ibid.*, 1.

29. Chima Korieh, "'Other' Bodies: Western Feminism, Race, and Representation in Female Circumcision Discourse," in *Female Circumcision and the Politics of Knowledge: African Women in Imperialist Discourses*, ed. Obioma Nnaemeka (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), 125.

30. *Ibid.*, 112.

31. *Ibid.*, 126.

32. Ibid., 111.
33. Dirie, *Desert Dawn*, 167.
34. Chinedu Ogoke, *African Writers in Exile* (Williamstown, MA: Piraeus, 2011), 198.
35. Ibid.
36. Zabus, "Acquiring Body," 64.
37. Waris Dirie, *Desert Flower: The Extraordinary Journey of a Desert Nomad* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2011), 112.
38. Ibid., 131.
39. Ibid., 215.
40. Korieh, "'Other' Bodies," 126.
41. Nnaemeka, *Female Circumcision*, 10.
42. Korieh, "'Other' Bodies," 120.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid., 121.
45. Dirie, *Desert Flower*, 219.
46. Ibid., 224.
47. Janice B. Fournillier and T. Lewis, "Finding Voice: Two Afro Caribbean Immigrant Members of the Academy Writing 'Home,'" *Studies in Continuing Education* 32, no. 2 (2010): 159.
48. Dirie, *Desert Dawn*, 166.
49. Bulbeck, "(White) Feminism," 88.
50. Dirie, *Desert Dawn*, 212.
51. Dirie, *Desert Children*, 210.
52. Vicki Kirby, "Our Bodies, Our Selves?" in *Female Circumcision and the Politics of Knowledge: African Women in Imperialist Discourses*, ed. Obioma Nnaemeka (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), 87.
53. Ibid., 83.
54. Ibid., 87.
55. Dirie, *Desert Dawn*, 74.
56. Ibid., 136.
57. Ibid., 154.
58. Ibid., 178.
59. Ibid., 188.
60. Ibid., 180.
61. Ibid., 73.
62. Ibid., 223.
63. Kirby, "Our Bodies," 88.
64. Ibid.
65. Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perspective* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2002), 9.
66. Ibid., 6.
67. Ibid., 7.
68. Ibid., 10.
69. Ibid., 6.

70. Ibid., 7; emphasis added.

71. Ange-Marie Hancock, "Overcoming Willful Blindness: Building Egalitarian Multicultural Women's Coalitions," in *Female Circumcision and the Politics of Knowledge: African Women in Imperialist Discourses*, ed. Obioma Nnaemeka (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), 260.

72. Elisabeth Bekers, "Culture in Transit: The Migration of Female Genital Excision to Europe in Euro-African Writing," in *Transcultural Modernities: Narrating Africa in Europe*, ed. Elisabeth Bekers, Sissy Helff, and Daniela Merolla, *Matafu* 36 (2009): 138.

73. Dirie, *Desert Children*, 74.

Esiaba Irobi

Poetry at the Margins

Isidore Diala

The Nigerian playwright, stage director, actor, theater theorist, scholar, and poet, Esiaba Irobi (1960–2010) was the emblematic artist as an exile *and* a migrant. Born on Nigeria's Independence Day and, as a result, claiming a mystical kinship with the country, he nonetheless equated his life in Nigeria with exile, embittered as he was by the country's embodiment of the typical aberrations of the postcolonial state, especially epitomized by military rule. However, regarding emigration as transcendence and fleeing the country in 1989, his adventures through the border posts of the United Kingdom, the United States, and Germany revealed each of those countries to be, like Nigeria itself, a provisional station in his endless search for home and hearth. Thus, central in his exploration of his experience is Irobi's recognition of migration and exile as signal tropes of the tragic human estate itself. Given Irobi's typical inclination to formulate an *alternative* literary tradition and worldview by transforming Igbo cultural experience into paradigms potentially applicable to a wider humanity,¹ he appropriates the resources of indigenous Igbo elegiac poetry and epistemology in his invocation of a representative contemporary human experience as a prefiguration of the eternal migration of death. This exploitation of a postcolonial Igbo/African imaginary to illuminate a contemporary transnational experience foregrounds a dimension of metaphysical exile that extends and complicates Edward Said's notion.

In *Representations of the Intellectual* Said categorizes the exilic condition into two types: actual and metaphorical exile. The former condition derives mainly from the experience of dislocation and migration, and ranges from the banishment of individuals or whole communities and peoples to their displacement by such impersonal forces like war, famine, and disease. On the other hand, Said's concept of metaphorical exile transcends the domain of social

and political history and includes individuals whose sense of dissonance or dissent estranges them from their society and the pattern of morality sanctioned by the prevalent authorities and the unreflective human herd. His location of the socially responsible intellectual invariably at the margins of society derives from his insight that such an intellectual is fundamentally a dissident. Basically a metaphorical or metaphysical condition, Said's intellectual exile, potentially applicable even to the citizen, indigene, or native, is creative self-ostracism in preference to profitable allegiance to authority and tradition; it is the lot of "individuals at odds with their society and therefore outsiders and exiles so far as privileges, power, and honors are concerned. . . . Exile for the intellectual in this metaphysical sense is restlessness, movement, constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others."²

Said's distinctions of the exile, the refugee, expatriate, and the migrant in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* are typically instructive. Where he traces exile to the ancient practice of banishment, he considers *refugee* a political term associated with the twentieth-century state. However, as the latter concept connotes for Said whole communities or large groups of people requiring international assistance, he tends to exclude from it the sense of "solitude and spirituality," which he considers as definitive of exile. On the other hand, it is the possibility of volition that distinguishes for Said the expatriate and the migrant from the exile and the refugee: "Expatriates voluntarily live in an alien country, usually for personal or social reasons . . . Expatriates may share in the solitude and estrangement of exile, but they do not suffer its rigid proscriptions. Émigrés enjoy an ambiguous status. Technically, an émigré is anyone who emigrates to a new country. Choice in the matter is certainly a possibility."³ The terms certainly overlap on occasion as an individual's circumstances may conflate more than one condition, and the ambiguity is clearly heightened further by the fact that the metaphysical exile needs to cross no border posts to assume the label. Nor do all exiles seek to mitigate their estrangement through migration. However, Said's metaphysical exile, by the fact of his or her innate inability to settle in anywhere, is invariably potentially a figure of eternal voyage. In many traditional societies, including Irobi's, prophets especially, but occasionally artists also, were such liminal figures, social outcasts, in their dedication to the proclamation of a dimension of otherworldly truths or values. Irobi recognizes writers by their invariable opposition to the status quo as contemporary society's commonest exiles and demonstrates their obsession with boundaries and border posts. His awareness of both his metaphysical and social exilic condition, his reflections on that human estate, and his complex negotiations of the condition, especially his doomed efforts to mitigate his metaphysical alienation through migration, constitute the core of his three published poetry collections, *Cotyledons*, *Inflorescence*, and *Why I Don't Like Philip Larkin and Other Poems*, where he painstakingly charts and documents the tragic trajectory of his life and the beleaguered course of his country. In this chapter, I reflect on the implications of Said's insights for understanding the poetry of Irobi, and foreground how Irobi's exploration of his embodiment of the conditions of both

actual and metaphoric exile extends Said's category of metaphysical exile. I demonstrate that Irobi's focus not only on the agony of actual exile but also on the *afterlife* sets in relief an undertextualized dimension of Said's "metaphysical" exile, perhaps more appropriately designated as "metaphorical," given that it is in reality secular and is used by Said to suggest "an act of will that the intellectual performs in order to stand outside the comfortable receptivity of home or nation."⁴ I also appraise the abiding tension inherent in Irobi's conflation of the historical and metaphysical.

Irobi's oeuvre, including his poetry and drama, shows his fixation on a set of related themes, all of which are indissolubly linked to his country's postcolonial condition and, later, to his experience of racism and exile in the West. He is obsessed with the expropriations of imperialism, oppression, and its psychopathology, political corruption, and the trauma of exile. His work is equally held together by his immersion in his Igbo culture as a source of creative inspiration and spiritual anchorage. Regarding oral Igbo/African songs as his model, he sought to redefine the craft of poetry as it was practiced by his predecessors by making it more accessible, lyrical, dramatic, and closer to the realities of the life of the ordinary folk.

Vilifying the early Christopher Okigbo (who, like Irobi himself, was also of Igbo background) and his generation for their work marked by "private esotericism,"⁵ Irobi saw in Okigbo's later "Path of Thunder" a model for the transformation he sought, given Okigbo's newfound devotion to the traditional repertory, and especially given his disparagement of the military. Moreover, Irobi's admiration of Soyinka's exaltation of the revolutionary attributes of the Yoruba god of metallurgy, the hunt, and agriculture, Ogun, led him to the myth of Amadioha, the Igbo god of thunder, lightning, and justice, whom he, however, recreated occasionally in the image of Ogun. Irobi discerned in Okigbo's "Path of Thunder" not only a model for poetic militancy; he saw in Okigbo's invocation and exaltation of Thunder as mythic enforcer of a justice paradigm consistent with his own projection of revolutionary fervor onto Amadioha's famed thunderbolts in Igbo mythology. The "Poetry of Thunder" became Irobi's metonymy for a revolutionary poetic credo and politics. In Irobi's hands, poetry was performance and was imbued with the capability of detonation with palpable consequences on its audience. But, of course, he was equally laying mines in his own comfort zone as accounts of Irobi's life as a young faculty member at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and his own poetry, seething with personal accounts of the debilitating experiences and circumstances that hindered his intellectual and artistic career as well as the growth of his country, highlight early intimations that he was bound to be hounded into migration and exile.

Tanure Ojaide, the Nigerian writer and scholar now residing in the United States, has noted the growing number of African writers involved in the worldwide phenomena of migration and globalization, and remarked on the impact of that experience on their writings: "Migration, globalization, and the related phenomena of exile, transnationality, and multilocality have their bearing on the cultural identity, aesthetics, content, and form of literary production of Africans

abroad.”⁶ Ojaide draws attention to general trends in those works, but also identifies individual background and experience as critical in the writers’ response to their pervasive experience of dislocation. Irobi’s deep indignation at the humiliations of exile expressed itself in passionate elegies and bitter imprecations.

Irobi’s poem for the writer Salman Rushdie “Sisyphus” is possibly one of his most compelling statements on the vocation of the writer in the modern world and the artist’s spiritual homelessness. An absorbing reflection on the import of the 1989 fatwa condemning Rushdie to death, the poem is also at the same time a powerful self-portrait and has as one of its most important subthemes the writer’s temptations and invariable carrierhood in modern society. Irobi’s sense of the writer’s considerable authority is evident enough in his anxiety about the writer’s “hubris” and “temptations of power, megalomania and the godhead” in the writer’s “bid to make and transcend history.”⁷ Remarking on the impossibility of personal victory in the writer’s vocation, he laments the “fangs of history, the terrors of creativity” and “the metaphysical anguish / of writing in our time.”⁸ Ostensibly affirming the necessity of religious faith and the idea of God, and so questioning Rushdie’s interrogation of these, Irobi characterizes the writer as the eternal metaphysical exile like Sisyphus and Prometheus in league with humans against the gods. He discerns in Rushdie’s defamation of the gods not only his eternal metaphysical exile, but also the intimations of his immortality, and highlights his own corresponding actions and their consequences. It is precisely in Irobi’s recognition of his kinship with Rushdie as writers as well as the fundamental affinity of all powers, secular or religious, in collusion against the writer that his layering of personal experience acquires global significance.

“Sisyphus” is basically an elegy on the writer’s lot. Its theme of the condemnation of a writer to death, by being replicated in the experience of the poet-speaker himself, assumes the dimension of a generalized condition. This is further accentuated by the status of both as writers in exile and the poem’s meditation on the (metaphysical) homelessness of the visionary writer, given his or her alienation of constituted authorities, including even the gods. Rushdie’s fatwa has meant his exclusion to the margins, necessitated by his virtual imprisonment, which the poet treats as an emblematic entombment in his “occluded sanctuary,”⁹ and presents his occasional appearances in varying disguises as virtual incarnations. The substance of Irobi’s reflection on Rushdie’s lot is its consolations in spite of the terrors of life. By its invocation of spring, the elegiac poem typically ends in exultation through an appeal to the great natural mystery of transfiguration and the warmth of a provisional home:

So, Salman, rebel, madman, mystic, thief, vagabond, martyr,
scapegoat, carrier, hero, myth-maker extraordinary,
let us cease our whining and celebrate our mutual sentences
thanking the Beasts of Sandhurst and Ayatollah Khomeini,
post-humously of course, for this joyous rash
of little green leaves; the earth’s own song about all things green,

budding things, Spring's nodules of our nostalgia
for a new season of love, forgiveness and a place
we can finally call home, not the long home.¹⁰

The dream of a home is the exile's deepest compulsion; but, at least in Irobi's case, migration is a delusory promise of a radical cure, which only exacerbates the original condition to lethal proportions. Sublimating his personal experience by dramatizing it in the context of the corresponding narrative of a world-renowned writer and an ancient myth, Irobi enunciates a myth of the modern writer in which his or her symbolic victimhood accumulates historical valence as the vulnerability of the gods is emblematic of the contingency of all regimes: "Sisyphus rolling the stone eternally uphill / only to watch it come rolling downhill, / knowing that one day the toes of the gods will / begin to bleed?"¹¹ (In Irobi's earlier poem in *Inflorescence*, also titled "Sisyphus," he cites Albert Camus's insight into Sisyphus's rise beyond the condition of his torment and introduces a brief dialogue that foregrounds Sisyphus's defiance.) But especially by characterizing the (modern) writer as Sisyphus, Irobi strives to emphasize his or her endless exile and metaphysical torment arising from rebellion against tradition, authority, the sacred, and thus accounting for his making him or her a potential figure of ceaseless migrations.

Two obsessions of Irobi's poetry of the 1980s extend his conception of the poet and mark him out for persecution and consequent migration: his infinite contempt for the military and experimentation with poetic form. Repeatedly characterized as "Beasts of Sandhurst" in Irobi's poetry, soldiers in "Curfews" in *Inflorescence* are monsters of the night at whose approach the poet envisages a bloody and abrupt end to his life:

Can you see them now

Crouching in ambush
Like the beasts they are modelled upon?
So, love, if by dawn

You see my intestines
Hanging like garlands from their fangs
Or my glands gushed out on the ground

Like the metaphors of this poem,
Do not cry. Just remember what now I say to you:
"These men are not humane,

Neither are they human.
To them every life is worth a bullet,
A bayonet or a letter bomb."¹²

For Irobi, the grave cost of the soldier's obsession with power and its indispensable corollary, destruction, is the gift of compassion, doubtlessly one of humankind's most transcendent attributes. Fangs, bullets, bayonets, and bombs are the emblems of the efficiencies of power that, however, erode the humanity of those fixated on them.

In the same collection, "Sandhurst" (written in the vicinity of the Royal Military Academy in Camberley, near the village of Sandhurst, Berkshire) evokes all the routine paraphernalia, hollow ceremonies, and typical insignia of military honor beneath which, however, the poet discerns a ghoul's relentless and distinctive fascination with blood:

Carnivores, your visions are blurred
By blood. Your gums are grisly.
Your dazzling stripes and feline strides

Are nothing, absolutely nothing
Nothing, but the insignia
Of the Beasts of Sandhurst.¹³

Irobi's abiding insight is the soldier's metamorphosis to a beast caused by his enthrallment with power and terror.

In the poem "New York," the image of brute military destructiveness becomes a metaphor for the entire nation whose indiscriminate blood lust spares neither the most distinguished nor most peaceful: "Oh, Maikotri is a carnivore / That devours the swift gazelle / The striped zebra, the singing nightingale / Devours the beautiful and the splendid / Devours even a beautiful girl like Peace."¹⁴ The carnage is evoked as a grisly inventory of dismembered human parts:

This is the season of scarecrows
When our lives like grains of corn
Are scattered in the wind by decrees and edicts
The season of harvest, when our baskets
Are filled to the brim with butchered limbs
Gouged eyeballs, lumps of brain, strands of
Flesh and blood spurting from shivered veins.¹⁵

Irobi's iterative revelation is the brute primordial jungle that was Nigeria under the military and which made migration an irresistible option, especially for those viewed as oppositional by the authorities. In "The Sahel Savannah" in *Cotyledons* and "Horizons! Horizons!" in *Why I Don't Like Philip Larkin and Other Poems*, the poet derisively subjects the military to the humiliation of naming its own brutishness. In the latter poem, examples of invectives characterizing a cult of unkind humans are legion: "Scavengers of the Sahel savannah," "Computerized human beings," "Zombies," "Little Vapid Minds," "Baboons," "Uniformed Apes,"

“Fuhrers,” “Hannibal’s illegitimate children,” and many other repulsive epithets. Irobi’s repertoire of invectives points in the direction of various histories and cultures of tyranny and dehumanization as he presumably thought the Nigerian military an embodiment of those various dark energies and proclivities.

It was equally typical of Irobi in the 1980s that his audacity extended to the search for a performative style that made his already weighty subject even more explosive. In Irobi’s account in an interview of his battle through poetry against one of the potentates at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, he explains his consummate cultivation of the militant possibilities of oral African poetry that easily made it his preferred weapon: “It involves the body, it involves the spirit, it involves the soul, it gives the latitude for improvisation and for commenting on what is happening at the moment that you are creating. So it is not a fixed text; it is open, it is explosive—it subverts the political structure.”¹⁶ In *Why I Don’t Like Philip Larkin and Other Poems*, he recalls with great relish how he and kindred poets of his generation at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, strove to revolutionize the art of poetry:

we set darkness ablaze
with our cricket’s voices trying to rescue poetry from
the rusting library racks, where it was read on the printed
page by cockroaches and rodents, unto the blazing stage
where we let it prowl like an unshackled tiger.¹⁷

Irobi writes on the eventual demolition of the theater, the Anthill, the scene of most of the performance marvels of Irobi and his colleagues, as a punitive measure, and as evidence of the offended authorities’ tribute to the potency of poetry. The loss of that invaluable pedestal for staging resistance had a lasting impact on Irobi’s mind. For Irobi and his colleagues who defined poetry by its will to speak truth to power and to interrogate the questionable morality of the lethargic masses, it was a grim paradox that their effort to recuperate poetry from the periphery led to its institutionalized marginalization by the military regimes in Nigeria, which sternly rebuffed all opposition.

Oyeniya Okunoye, who considers the effect of military dictatorship as arguably the most pervasive and enduring influence on post-civil war Nigerian poetry, has drawn attention to its inspiration of a “variety of poetic idioms” as well as its emboldening of the poet and redefinition of the poet’s social standing.¹⁸ Similarly, Sule Egeya regards the military dictatorships of General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida (1986–93) and the late General Sani Abacha (1993–98) as the peak of military oppression in Nigeria, and remarks on the deepening rage and aggression that typically characterized the Nigerian poetry of that era, as some of the writers themselves had been victims of military oppression.¹⁹ Irobi embodied the aggression and audacity that characterized his generation of poets, and his carefully articulated poetics in the poem “Handgrenade” in *Inflorescence* reveals his paradoxical loathing of and fascination with the military.

A representative poem of Irobi's art at Nsukka, "Handgrenade," incarnates the basic aims and form of the poetry that Irobi aspired to, at least in that period of his career. Locating the poet in the fraternity of artisans, Irobi appraises poetry as an art form that serves society a crucial utilitarian purpose as a means of combating injustice and tyranny. Through Irobi's principle models—the rigorous blacksmith, the painstaking carpenter, the crafty carver—he nonetheless revalidates the traditional concept of the making of art as a meticulous labor of love. In his obligatory deployment of military motifs, however, Irobi is not merely iconoclastic but illustrates a basic ironic consequence of his fixation with the military. Irobi's absorption with the military is clear enough in his self-image in this poem as "a soldier of diction."²⁰ His toils aim to transform his similes into "shrapnel," his images into "bayonets," and his symbols into "handgrenades." Irobi's ideal poet apparently envies the blood lust, which Irobi contends typifies the military, given that the poet's deepest longing is to "slash the heads of heedy Heads of State" and that he adores the glint of "bayonets planted between the ribs of tyrants."²¹ The poet-speaker, called by Irobi's first name "Esiaba," acknowledges the manifold approaches to the door of poetry but privileges the militant:

Some poets lock this door with obscure keys.
Others, armed with pincers, pick the lock ideologically.
Many filch their way into the hall of literature.
The leftovers slide under the shutters like termites

But I, I Esiaba, I kicked the door open
Because I was on the other side. And
Poetry is this child crying in my hands
Crying only as a child would cry, shovelling
Everything into its starving mouth, including
Bread, ballots, bullets, bayonets and blood.²²

The poet's "other side" is the obverse side of power and privilege as the famished child epitomizes the location of social periphery, Lear's poor naked wretches, whom the poet chooses above the socially powerful.

But through his poetic replication of the strategies of the military much maligned in his work, Irobi paradoxically edges himself further to the margins by placing himself at the center of the military censor's gaze. His daring spirit repudiated adaptation; it scorned moderation. Historically, Irobi was approaching the threshold of the eerie region where migration was an option only to the most privileged antagonists to the military dictatorships he opposed. Okunoye observes, "The occasional pretences to liberalism that Babangida exhibited gave way to the worst form of autocracy under Abacha. The consequence was the rise in cases of state-sponsored murders, detention of activists and unprecedented lawlessness."²³ The will to marginalize the opposition artist or activist, which is invariably a desire to check dissidence, and which usually expresses itself in the forms of incarceration, censorship, banishment, or the symbolic

carnage of the poet's tongue, is in reality a paranoia that often seeks a resolution in the death of a formidable rival.

"Horizons! Horizons!" is Irobi's fullest account of the circumstances of his migration to the United Kingdom. For him the general compelling factor is the depressed economy and the legion of horrors into which it necessarily mutates. The consequent collapse of the university system and the brain drain that followed this are particularly hurtful to the poet:

The citadel was crumbling, and Georgie, it made me weep
to see the best minds of successive generations queue
in lines like flies for positions as commissioners, ministers
or ambassadors from the spiders of Dodan Barracks.

Or at the British High Commission, the United States Embassy,
even the Malawi Embassy, to see my own professors, great
intellectuals, lecturers, Vice Chancellors, penned like cattle
to the slaughter in queues that reminded you of kwashiorkor
clinics during the civil war. They stretched out, in thousands,
in queues as long as our memory of soldiers in power, in the
blazing sun, those I love and deeply respect, stretched out
sniffing each other's arses like copulating dogs, howling
and baying for visas to escape like me to the brave new world.²⁴

Irobi's momentous dual metaphors of the starving population of a war-torn nation and shrieking dogs in the frenzy of lust are calculated to evoke the total loss of dignity and hope as well as to account for the desperation to migrate that culminated in the notorious brain drain of the 1990s. In Irobi's own case, the demolition of the Anthill was not only a malicious onslaught on the arts but also the demolition of his symbolic home.

However, much as Irobi tends to highlight the element of volition in his emigration to the United Kingdom, his full representation of the circumstances of his flight in "Horizons! Horizons!" exemplifies the ambiguity that Said discerns in the status of the "migrant." For Irobi's detailed description of his harrowing encounter with agents of the state's secret service also stresses the element of compulsion and so at least in part presents his emigration as banishment. Tortured for his alleged pejorative representation of the military in his writing, and threatened with death if he failed to leave the country within two weeks, Irobi was virtually exiled. The poet's interpretation of the gruesome burglary of his residence a week after the pronouncement of his exile as a possible prelude to his imminent assassination by agents of the state reveals the intense pressure on him to flee:

The thieves or
assassins left, across my pillow, the iron rod they had used to
break the lock and smash the drawer of my reading table.
Was that hieroglyph of iron intended for my skull? They also

smashed the glove of my hurricane lantern and left a morbid note:
Your days in this country are numbered. Your cup
runneth over. Do not be your own vulture. Or you will be
a casket. Check out! Or we shall bury you in a shallow . . .²⁵

Many African migrants in the West, especially the intellectual elites categorized as expatriates, emigrated in response to pressures comparable to Irobi's.

Simon Gikandi traces the economic crisis of African nations in the 1980s ironically to "the so-called structural adjustments initiated by the World Bank and multilateral financial organizations to stabilize African economies."²⁶ He remarks on how the massive cuts in the funding of higher education deeply hurt the production of knowledge and eventually led to the mass exodus of African scholars to Europe and North America. Linking this mass exodus of Nigerian/African scholars to the crisis of intellectual modernity in Africa and even the collapse of the postcolonial state, Adebayo Williams comments on the formation of a diasporic intelligentsia of African extraction and laments the loss of the institutional validation their presence would have lent to African universities.²⁷ If Williams, however, had been particularly mournful about the "autumnal exile" of the most distinguished of Africa's older scholars and creative writers, Irobi's own generation followed hot on the heels of its elders.

For the poet, though, even the apparent choice to migrate is ultimately a compulsion for it is peculiarly the experience of persecution at the hands of the country's military rulers arising from his practice as a socially committed writer that constrained him to emigrate:

I was fleeing from the myriad indignities I had suffered,
recusantly, at the hands of the Beasts of Sandhurst:
Their violent signatures on my skull. The scars on my soul.
The sores blooming like sunflowers on this blistered piece
of earth you could have mistaken for what was once my heart.
The carrion flies buzzing. Their symphony? Hannibal's Halleluyah!²⁸

The close attention paid to the tortured body and its afflictions (given that torture was a common strategy of Nigerian military regimes to extort silence and conformity) highlights the hazards that the writer must defy to proclaim the truth. The enduring impact of the horrors of the national experience on the human mind remains the deepest dread of the fleeing poet:

As I fled, I thought, perhaps I had been too long
in that kiln, too long in that catacomb, that poisonous
womb, stewing in a blinding amniotic fluid, acidic, corrosive,
abusive to the memory beyond the lore of any known
epoch of human history. It was a place, Georgie,
coruscating and paralyzing to the spirit. Maicuntry.²⁹

A poem of many modes and moods, partly narrative, partly dramatic, primarily elegiac, but nonetheless exultant in its vision of the future, "Horizons! Horizons!" offers a gloomy appraisal of the totality of the poet's political experience through colonialism, sovereignty, military rule, and Biafra. It associates the poet's migration with the rites of death and mourning, and envisages the transition, in spite of recurring doubts, as a harbinger of renewal and rebirth in a new and alluring firmament ecstatically doubly invoked in the title of the poem: "I left to start afresh, in exile, / in a different country, hoping to put in order, like a heap of broken / pots this magnificent mess I call a career and a poet's life."³⁰ Casting somber doubts about the beneficence of exile, Said notes, "Exile is sometimes better than staying behind or not getting out: but only sometimes."³¹ Irobi's migration to and exile in the United Kingdom was of course a complete disaster and necessitated further migration!

Irobi's close friend and colleague at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and fellow traveler, Olu Oguibe, has traced Irobi's challenge to settling in fully at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in part to powerful senior colleagues there who made his life a torment and eventually had a hand in driving him into exile. Oguibe's thinking is that Irobi's "prodigious talent, irrepressible garrulity and seemingly affected eccentricity" or perhaps the professional frustrations of those senior colleagues may well have excited their cruelties against a much younger colleague who seemed to embody virtues that foregrounded their failures.³² Oguibe's speculations on why Irobi's exile in the United Kingdom failed so disastrously are legion: Irobi's residence in Sheffield, Liverpool, and Leeds rather than London with its active international theater communities, where his talent as a playwright most probably would have been received with enthusiasm; his abandonment of creative writing for scholarship, with the sobering implication that he had accepted his failure as a writer in the West; and inadequate preparation for survival in exile despite the prophetic apprehension expressed in his poetry. Commenting on Irobi's own observation that Europeans who moved to other parts of the world were referred to as "settlers," while other people moving to Europe were designated as "immigrants," Oguibe contends that most African expatriates actually contemplate themselves as eternal migrants rather than exiles with the "mind-set of momentary travellers, even seasonal migrant labourers":

This is altogether typical of African expatriates. When people arrive with no desire to settle, they make few plans and rather little effort to compete for a permanent place, no matter how well deserved. Because the intentions are ad hoc, and the focus is on return, the psychology of the African expatriate experience in the West goes a long way to explain our often far from resilient will to carve out a place and register our name not as fleeting players from elsewhere, but as rightful contenders, as settlers. In other words, it is not just the place that defines us as immigrants rather than settlers; we, in fact, arrive with the mentality of immigrants, and not settlers. Settlers dig in, immigrants give in. Or give up.³³

Remarking on Irobi's response to what Oguibe termed a "formidable and secretive culture machine," requiring not only talent and industry but also "tact, wily charm, and the ability to adapt easily and swiftly," he notes that Irobi could not just adapt and invariably relapsed into a second exile.³⁴

Irobi's actual exile and his experience of metaphysical exile made differing demands on him and equally impacted differently on his art and psyche. His marginality in Nigeria was the virtual obligatory institutionalized exclusion that is the lot of most opposition artists. The attention the Nigerian state, under the military, paid to Irobi and his work was proof to him that his art mattered. Expectedly, his mood was buoyant and defiant, and his temper heroic. He certainly lost confidence in the morality of the system, but never in himself or the quality of his work. Interestingly, he saw in his failure to win important national awards sufficient evidence that laurels were inextricably linked to politics and constituted a means of lionizing conformist artists and marginalizing further deviant ones. Reflecting in an interview on the failure of his play, *The Colour of Rusting Gold*, to win the Association of Nigerian Writers' Drama Prize in 1985, Irobi said, "Actually there was a time in Nigeria when I wanted some validation, some recognition, and I felt that there was a lot of politics in what was happening."³⁵ On the contrary, in the United Kingdom, Irobi discerned a malicious collusion of mainstream publishers, assessors, and editors to foist mediocrity on his work as a justification for its grim regime of marginalization. Thus, if Irobi's poetry of resistance in Nigeria in reality was poetry of affirmation, his response to his experience in the West was indignation and bitter cynicism.

The poem "Adaeze" epitomizes the paradoxes of exilic reminiscences: enthralling nostalgic recollections that inscribe the past in apparent glory, which, however, are sternly interrogated by vivid remembrances of the compulsions that necessitated migration and exile in the first instance. The University of Nigeria, Nsukka, remains Irobi's eternal haunt as it was the scene of his greatest promise and so constituted the measure of the failures of exile. The poet's searing self-appraisal in exile is explicit in the epithets meant to conjure great expectations that were unrealized. At Nsukka, he was "the promise held in the hand. The bright star of his generation"; England begets a new self-image of scorn: "An object of laughter for the dunces of Europe."³⁶ In his chastened self-assessment, he writes further: "I am a successful failure here. I am the dream that decayed in Gt. Britain."³⁷ The "garbage dumps behind the tall university walls"³⁸ signal the literal and figurative putrescence, which the poet fled through migration. But his self-portrait of exile in the United Kingdom, completely lacking in all the social moorings and trappings of an accommodated citizen in the modern world, is as an outcast: "I have no wife, no child, no house, no plot of land, / no mortgage and no plans to take any in England. No insurance, no overdraft / facilities, and no allotment in this city's cemetery. No laurels."³⁹ The poet's social exclusion and isolation, and the stark bleakness of his prospects in England fill him with rancor. Said has noted the resentment with which exiles regard nonexiles because they perceive the latter as belonging in their surroundings whereas an exile is always invariably out

of place.⁴⁰ Irobi was driven far beyond resentment because he discerned that Western society was carefully structured to exclude him and people like him.

However, it is especially the contrast in the reception of his poetry that hurts the exiled poet most deeply:

A failed poet whose rejection slips are delivered with a special van
marked Her Majesty's Malicious Service. A tattered soul whose drawers
overflow with illiterate letters from dim publishers who insist poetry
does not sell. Which is why, as often as I can, I return by memory to
Nsukka,
my amoenus locus, where I was a bud so full of promise . . .⁴¹

Said has suggested that part of the anguish of the experience of exile derives from the impossibility of a complete severance from the exile's place of origin, especially in the modern world with its capacity to diminish geographical space: "The exile therefore exists in a median state, neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half-involvements and half-detachments, nostalgic and sentimental on one level, an adept mimic or a secret outcast on another."⁴² Irobi's anguish and resentment clearly highlight his postcolonial status. The withering pun on the Royal Mail, "Her Majesty's Malicious Service," is a cryptic way of locating his fate in the longer history of the violations and deprivations of British imperialism. The theme of the migrant/exiled writer is recurrent in Irobi's work in the West. This is partly because of his obsession with the foundering in the United Kingdom of his hitherto promising career as a writer; it is also in part because even more fundamentally, he interprets his travails in exile as consistent with the metaphysical human condition itself, and so explores writing, just like drinking and sensuality, as a response to that estate. Said contends that even an exile's triumphs are in truth efforts meant to resolve and conquer the deep anguish of estrangement, and with reference to the endeavor of an exiled poet distinguishes between the art and the artist: "To see a poet in exile—as opposed to reading the poetry of exile—is to see exile's antinomies embodied and endured with unusual intensity."⁴³ In Irobi's case, the identities of the poet and poet-speaker are so completely merged there is hardly a distinction to make, especially as the accounts of his life in exile outside his poetry replicate the anguish of his poetic voice.⁴⁴

"Spring," written for Seamus Heaney, and "Treasure Island" and "Hope Place," both of which were conceived as verse letters to his close friend and confidante Georgina Alaukwu, contain some of Irobi's most scathing criticism of the English because they are also among the poet's bitterest accounts of the response of the English to his poetry. In "Spring," Irobi associates England with a state he dreaded most about Nigeria: a paralysis of the mind and spirit that makes his attempts to create either futile or too bitter. Rejecting despondency, however, the poet accepts his situation with Sisyphian resilience: "waiting for the moment when I can again rhyme / my rage into reason, veer my venom into verse, /

anchor angst and anger into art. For now, however, / crushed and humiliated, muted, speaking through / a mouth gun-butteted by history and time and rage . . .”⁴⁵ The auguries, however, are too dark. The poem ends on the poet’s sober acceptance of his inconsequence; his indication of his need for further intoxication to face the gray realities of life; the darkening of his vision; an ominous reference to a funeral hymn; and a subtle accusation of England for his travails.

Irobi’s cynicism toward British response to (his) poetry in “Treasure Island” and “Hope Place” is even deeper. The English are “philistine,” “dumb parrots and ostriches of literature.”⁴⁶ He asks rhetorically, “Was I a pearl before pigs? Or a pig before pearls?”⁴⁷ He is convinced, however, that he was “a candle” flickering unappreciated under a bushel for seven years in England; “an African diamond in an English shithole / illuminating like a circus bear the wounds and sores of exile.”⁴⁸ If Hope Place where he lived in Liverpool is a veritable “Dante’s Hell,” the English, in general, are trounced as one man:

And I ask again: Was Carthage this base? Was Rome
this crass and vulgar when it was ransacked by Alaric
the Visigoth? Was it always like this in Treasure Island?
Is there a more aspiritual race on the surface of this earth?
Georgie, the English are such a secular tribe that they
had to invent cricket to remind them of eternity.⁴⁹

Irobi’s considerable self-esteem was crushed in England and his repudiation of the English who failed to recognize his genius was total.

Irobi knew that his untenable situation in England was virtually suicidal. Anger and indignation or possibly even vengeance must be read as a deliberate survival strategy that gave a vent to his fury:

Abused, trans-atlantically, by publishers,
I hide here in this disintegrating city with its second-world-war
architecture,
bidding my time, chiselling at my javelins,
waiting for my finest hour, to hurl them at passers-by and other
pilgrims of the night, meanwhile taking my revenge on the profound
ecstasies
of a damaged life by examining the dirty and untidy underbelly
of our collective history, philosophy and metaphysics.⁵⁰

He even confesses to having considered joining the IRA to fight the English and to temptations to kill an English policeman! Irobi illuminates the ironic, amoral, and anarchic space of international politics, given that its scheme of exclusions necessarily compels its malcontents into bitter enemy armies. F. Njubi Nesbitt has noted that African migrants in the West, even more than African American intellectuals, embody W. E. B. Du Bois’s “‘double consciousness,’ and are less prepared for the pervasive racism and second-class status

ascribed to them in a racist culture that stereotypes Black people as athletes and entertainers.”⁵¹ Irobi’s title poem “Why I Don’t Like Philip Larkin” is a scathing lampoon of the white racist poet-speaker who is inconsolable that blacks are already the dominant force in sports in the West, and likens their growing influence in scholarship to the violation of a fundamental natural order, a situation he blames on liberal immigration policies:

This is the bubonic plague. The eclipse of our final sun
 Darkness falls and sadness reigns. And this blessed isle
 Of ours is now full of strange noises; the chatter of equatorial
 Chimpanzees and the babble of red-buttocked baboons.
 . . . It’s their fault;
 those stupid immigration officers at Heathrow. They are
 letting every creepy thing into this country these days
 Every upright thing. These nig-nogs have taken over boxing . . .
 And now, here they come, with paws outstretched to pounce
 on scholarship, literary scholarship, our final preserve, with the
 ferocity of rats on rotting meat.⁵²

Irobi’s refusal to accept the lowly Western image of himself was paradoxically a source of both deep torment and possible transcendence.

Irobi repeatedly often reflects on his situation as an exile as consistent with the human estate and ponders on the divertissements through which he seeks refuge from the crushing realities of (an exile’s emotional) life: “*There were those lonely Saturdays, Georgie. For seven years, those depressed, corrosive weekends when neither alcohol nor nicotine nor caffeine nor sexual intercourse with a corpse, England, could contain the craving and the cries for home.*”⁵³ He adds to the list the warm company of the fraternity of other marginalized postcolonial (oral) poets, what Maxine Montgomery calls “a transnational assembly of outcasts.”⁵⁴ Recurrently, though, Irobi makes his art the primary consoling grace in his narrative of exile: “What miracle kept me alive, my spirit unbroken despite / the slow but sustained lynching? Only the craft of verse, / the love of the students, vodka, red wine and Georgie, / the deciduous hope that I will one day return back to you.”⁵⁵ The possibility of a return home broached in this poem, alluded to rather vaguely in other others, is the central theme of the final poem of *Why I Don’t Like Philip Larkin*, “I Shall Return.”

Irobi’s experience demonstrates how the metaphysical exilic condition inspires migration as well as how migration itself is both a cause and a consequence of actual exile, given that it typically fails to resolve the condition that necessitates the original adventure across national boundaries. Migration to the United Kingdom may well have saved Irobi from early death in his potentially fatal encounter with the Nigerian military junta. But the prospects of a successful writing career in England that he had envisaged could not even begin nor could he find a home there. The aching awareness of his spiritual homelessness made him meditate on his situation as exile, especially as the thought of home-going inspired terror in him. In the poem “Nairobi” in *Cotyledons*, Irobi

contemplates the dream of home as the exile's abiding torture: "And the terror returns. The eternal terror / Of the exile. The terror of return. / It returns and invades the villages of the mind / Like plumes of smoke in the belly of a beast."⁵⁶ He acknowledges in "I Shall Return" that the pull to the primal hearth is virtually irresistible. The impediments, however, remain daunting yet: "the Beasts of Sandhurst, / Or the Witchdoctors, necromancers in civilian attires."⁵⁷ The home that the poet yearns for and to which he hopes to return "in glory, in story or in song" can only be created by the complete transformation of the political landscape: "when the crocodiles have left the shore / and the teeth of the waves are no longer rinsed / with the blood of the slain . . ."⁵⁸

By representing home as the eternal dream deferred, Irobi accounts for his subsequent migration to the United States in 1997 and the second phase of his actual exile there, even when the prospects seemed to him lackluster, if not ghastly, right at the outset:

Tomorrow I'll be leaving for New York
on the second phase of my interminable
exile. Georgie, do not ask me how long
I will be out there in that hot and sticky city,
which I hear, like London or Liverpool,
sucks you in like a clam, like an enterprising
vagina, the big apple in the Garden of Eden,
Eve's beautiful pussy, her valley of no return.⁵⁹

The comparison between the English cities of London and Liverpool with New York reveals Irobi's fears of his lack of any real prospect in the United States. His horror of being sucked in was not merely in dread of the loss of selfhood and identity but the terror of death. The association of that dread with the woman is insightful. For Irobi had equally imagined his migration to England in sensual terms: "I had to hug / a different horizon, to seek solace in between the bosom / and warm thighs of a different continent and cuntry: / England."⁶⁰ His repeated representation of "country" as "cuntry" is, of course, also a sexual pun. Irobi's poetry acknowledges sensuality as a form of intoxicating balm to the cruel fate of exile, which the exile nonetheless must overcome to rise to a sober confrontation with life's myriad challenges. England, however, turned out to be no solicitous woman but had pushed him further to the edge of the precipice. Irobi's experience in the United Kingdom made him a wiser but sadder person and probably added the woman to the mental pathologies that tormented him.

At the outset, at least, Irobi found New York resuscitating. The migrant smelt home and strove for a sense of community, both among his colleagues in the theater and his Igbo/African kith and kin. Oguibe draws attention to Irobi's discovery of, and immediate identification with, the city's vibrant theater as well as the considerable Igbo diaspora community in the New York-New Jersey area. When we met for the first time in London in 2006, Irobi spoke spiritedly about colleagues in the United States as friendly and supportive, unlike in the United Kingdom where, he noted, colleagues deliberately

set traps for others and laughed if one got ensnared; of students in the United States, who like their Nigerian counterparts, were vociferous in their appreciation of a good lecture; and how with no counseling at all he had stopped drinking since he relocated to the United States. As Oguibe notes, though, his battle for tenure at Ohio University was bitter and he was soon to be diagnosed with cancer in 2006. Moreover, “something of the brazen edge that always drove him towards the centre” as a younger man “appeared to have been blunted by his experiences in Britain,” and Irobi was hardly thinking of his writing career any longer as he doubtlessly had concluded that he stood no chance of success in the West.⁶¹ Irobi had to move again. He even thought of returning to Nigeria.⁶² When in 2009 he was offered a fellowship at the Free University in Berlin, he was expectedly enthusiastic about the prospect of relocating to Germany. His metaphysical exilic condition could endure only a provisional abode.

It is in this failure of Irobi’s dream of both a national (Nigerian) and a global home that his apparent advocacy for the Biafran cause assumes full significance: Biafra is the incarnation of the exile’s/migrant’s eternal dream of a visionary home. In “Sisyphus,” Irobi describes himself as “an exiled poet from a fictitious country called Nigeria.”⁶³ In his biographical statement at the final station of his endless migration, the Institute for Interweaving Performance Cultures at the Free University of Berlin in Germany, he set in relief his haunting awareness of his eternal alienation even in his own country when he described himself thus: “Esiaba Irobi was born in the Republic of Biafra and has lived in exile in Nigeria, the UK and the USA.”

“Horizons! Horizons!” is the poem in which Irobi enacts the rites of migration and in which the references to Biafra proliferate and assume a pattern of meaning. In a style typical of Igbo/African oral poetry, “Horizons! Horizons!” incorporates refrains, but those refrains are rather irregular and are unusually adopted from different songs; they are also in at least three languages: Igbo, English, and Nigerian pidgin. Two of the refrains in Igbo (“Udu m akuwaa-laa” and “Laa n’udo, laa n’udo”) are drawn from two different Igbo dirges and accentuate the poet’s evocation of his imminent departure as a rite of transition; a pidgin song “Zombie o zombie” castigates the military as unfeeling and unthinking robots. Most of the refrains, however, are stanzas of sundry Biafran songs in Igbo and English, generally expressing a heroic self-sacrificial commitment to the Biafran cause. One such passage in Igbo is Irobi’s alluring evocation of Biafra as Heaven but for human mortality:

Ihe niile [*sic*] zuru oke n’ala Biafra
 Aku na uba zuruoke n’ala Biafra
 Umu nwaada zuruoke n’ala Biafra
 Naani onwu, onwu, onwu zuru uwa
 Naani onwu, leee, onwu lee onwu leeeee⁶⁴

For the poet writing of the anguish of exile, his use of Igbo is doubtlessly a nostalgic reclamation of a heritage of his indigenous culture.

Irobi's "translation" of the song into English, however, is revealing for it completely alters the poem's focus on Biafra in the original to death in the English version:

Biafra is the land of milk and honey
 Biafra flourishes with quails and manna
 Would have been Heaven, if not for Death.
 Death that devours the living. Death, the barebacked
 beast prowling through this beautiful landscape
 devouring everything in its wake, making life miserable for the
 living, the wounded and the maimed.⁶⁵

The Igbo poem is a panegyric in which the spirited adulation of Biafra is reined in by the poet-speaker's sober awareness of general human mortality; its English rendering is an overt elegy in which the existential terror of death is evoked as the preeminent force of life. If in the Igbo version, Biafra is central in three of the poem's five lines, in Irobi's English "translation," death features in five of the seven lines of the poem, making not the ethereal splendor of a *dream country* (both literally and figuratively) but the dark vision of human mortality paramount. Failed by both national and international politics, Irobi apparently seeks an ideal home in the liminal realm beyond the pale of politics, that is, in a heavenly *country of the mind*.

Irobi places "Ceramic Life," his memorable elegy for his friend, Chukwudi Eboh, at the heart of *Why I Don't Like Philip Larkin and Other Poems*, which is otherwise basically his expression of the anguish of migration and exile. The lamentation and exaltation of the young dead man, however, has a bearing to the poet himself beyond the general contemplation of human mortality. The premonitory opening lines are portentous:

Chukwudi, on the day you died, Death sent me a telegram.
 In it the vandal wrote: "I have devoured your friend,
 I now wait for you."⁶⁶

The apprehensive poet-speaker wayfarer who envisions the winding famished asphalt road as the "sinuous coils" of a deadly snake and "milestones as tombstones"⁶⁷ is a liminal figure haunting the threshold of mortal experience. The poem is moreover replete with tropes of movement and transition that define the collection's presiding theme of migration and exile. Irobi is resourceful in creating his leitmotif: the poet's anxious journey to the funeral of the dead friend; the procession of mourners; the departing soul traveling like the rays of the moon through space; the wheels and frames of a horror film rotating forever in the minds of the beholders. Preeminent in this scheme, however, is the image of the deceased as a young athlete galloping to the grandeur of

triumph paradoxically indistinguishable from death: “like a determined athlete, you galloped / On and on, as if you could escape the arms / Of the earth. You sprinted on and on and on / Until you ran out of breath.”⁶⁸ The delusion of the possible escape of the limits of life through flight is the grand theme of the collection and is reinforced by this elegy.

However, given the focal metaphysical dimension of Irobi’s presiding migration/exile theme in “Ceramic Life,” the poet’s emphasis is hardly on mortality but instead transcendence: loss is merely parenthetical; the brilliance of the illustrious dead illuminates the nether world; the bones of the noble dead, like great works of art, harden into precious stones. Art is triumphant over death: “May these words I sprinkle like ashes / Over your grave, echo through the pages / Of your heart, in paragraphs of love / And the parenthesis of loss, above the margin / Marked by Death.”⁶⁹ In death as in migration, Irobi is resolute in his search for the ineffable consolation—immortality, the rousing possibility of continuity, of a “return”—beyond even life’s perilous sea:

May the stanzas of this song, like your bones,
Harden into stones, precious stones
And into pearls. May they, one day, be washed
Out on some shiny shore like priceless shells
From the throat of the Sea.⁷⁰

Irobi sees the tumultuous sea as an archetypal image of the existential contingencies of life, but discerns intimations of immortality in the precious shells that litter the beach. He is doubtlessly fascinated that the emblematic relics are notably disorged by the ravenous sea itself.

The poem’s signal autobiographical significance is perhaps its exhortation of the deceased to a specific pattern of “return”: “if you must come again, you must come as a song, a song / of seven stanzas whose echoes will linger on and on / and on, in meaning, myth and melody.”⁷¹ The lines recur in Irobi’s contemplation of his own “return” necessarily at ebttide in “I Shall Return”: “I, the Minstrel, shall return. / In glory, in story or in song, I shall return.”⁷² This return, to be preceded by prodigious apocalyptic signs, is no prophecy of mere political transformation. The poet exhorts Georgie, to whom the poem is dedicated:

look up at the drifting clouds. Scan also
the blue. You will see, my love, under the branches
of the full moon and the rising sun, seven fingers
of light. Beneath them, like the resplendent hues
of an absent rainbow on an eloquent and remembering
retina, you will see the morning star appear.
Once you see the morning star, know, Georgie,
that it is me returning to you at ebttide.⁷³

Irobi's evocation of the full splendor of the cosmos is certainly too inordinate a metaphor to signal the return of any incarnate being. He might as well be describing the element of the mystical phenomenon of the transmigration of the soul. The possibility of a "return" links the themes of death and migration in Irobi's poetry as they are also bound together by a complex metaphor of voyaging that traverses land, sea, and sky.

Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia consider it an abiding paradox in Said that his conception of exile is deeply Eurocentric in spite of his instructive charting of the processes of constructing the "Other" in *Orientalism*, and his foregrounding the political implications of that imperial project. Where, therefore, they argue, the European exile is easily accommodated in a new "home" and enabled to recreate himself or herself and society by drawing on an essentially contrapuntal plurality of vision, "the 'other' exile is generally the product of the fracturing and fissuring of societies that have endured the wrath of colonialism and imperialism"⁷⁴ and unsurprisingly is not permitted to settle in a society whose dominant discourse had denigrated and marginalized his or her culture. Irobi's travails typify the lot of the "Other" exile expectedly not granted accommodation in the West. His fate interrogates Said's rather too enthusiastic celebration of exile as a powerful modernist metaphor of the asceticism that drives crucial intellectual accomplishments; it also exemplifies how austere socioeconomic situations, especially arising from institutionalized social/racial exclusion, actually hamper creativity and typically strengthen a metaphysical outlook on life. Thus, by accentuating the condition of actual exile and linking his distinctive unaccommodated (postcolonial) man with a notion of metaphysical estrangement deriving from his African culture, Irobi extends Said's notions of exile, actual and metaphorical.

Deeply alienated by what he referred to in his play *Nwokedi* as "our contemporary epileptic political situation,"⁷⁵ Irobi was hunted to the outskirts by the same forces that strove to ruin his country, Nigeria, and eventually hounded him into exile. Incessant migration and exile, however, revealed his restlessness to be irresolvable. Irobi's Biafran partisanship in reality was an attempt to exorcise the abiding specter of homelessness by the invocation of a liminal home as a dream country. His proclivity for the tragic form and the elegiac tells of a mind fixated on the sober realities of the human estate and it is perhaps only to be expected that his haunting search for a home should lead him to recognize the agonizing experience of migration and exile as a signal trope of the human situation itself. He envisioned that experience as demonstrably the most compelling contemporary reaffirmation of the ancient myth of the human as a wayfarer merely flitting through the arena of life. His work is replete with modes of negotiating that anguished experience in terms that reveal it as paradigmatic of humans' ineluctable estate. Irobi saw in African belief and epistemology an absorbing interrogation, if not a resolution, to humans' aboriginal alienation.

Notes

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1. Isidore Diala, *Esiaba Irobi's Drama and the Postcolony: Theory and Practice of Postcolonial Performance* (Ibadan: Kraft Books, 2014), 113.

2. Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 52–53.

3. Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 144.

4. Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia, *Edward Said: The Paradox of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1999), 54.

5. In Irobi's poem "London" in *Cotyledons*, the newly arrived immigrant poet-speaker, in a train journey through the city of London, associates Foyles with T. S. Eliot, to whom he traces Okigbo's opaque style:

And here I see a face I know so well,
And I cry out, "Eliot! Eliot!
You who mangled verse like an idiot,
The sunglasses you gave Christopher Okigbo
When will you take them back?" (10–11)

(See also Aiyejina, "Recent Nigerian Poetry in English.")

6. Tanure Ojaide, "Migration, Globalization, and Recent African Literature," *World Literature Today* 82, no. 2 (2008): 43.

7. Esiaba Irobi, *Why I Don't Like Philip Larkin and Other Poems* (Cambridge: Nsibidi, 2005), 13.

8. *Ibid.*, 15.

9. *Ibid.*, 16.

10. *Ibid.*, 18.

11. *Ibid.*, 17.

12. Esiaba Irobi, *Inflorescence: Selected Poems 1977–1988* (Enugu: Abic, 1989), 51.

13. *Ibid.*, 17.

14. Esiaba Irobi, *Cotyledons* (Enugu: Abic, 2009), 26.

15. *Ibid.*, 50.

16. Leon Osu, "Eclipsed Visions: Esiaba Irobi Interviewed, in *Syncretic Arenas: Essays on Postcolonial African Drama and Theatre for Esiaba Irobi*, ed. Isidore Diala (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014), 108.

17. Irobi, *Why I Don't*, 84.

18. Oyeniyi Okunoye, "Writing Resistance: Dissidence and Visions of Healing in Nigerian Poetry of the Military Era," *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* 48, no. 1 (2011): 65.

19. Sule E. Egya, "Art and Outrage: A Critical Survey of Recent Nigerian Poetry," *Research in African Literatures* 42, no. 1 (2011): 50.

20. Irobi, *Inflorescence*, 21.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Okunoye, "Writing Resistance," 75.
24. Irobi, *Why I Don't*, 92.
25. Ibid., 88.
26. Simon Gikandi, "Afterword: Outside the Black Atlantic," *Research in African Literatures* 45, no. 3 (2015): 243.
27. Adebayo Williams, "The Missing Scholar as Icon: Ben Obumelu and the Crisis of Intellectual Modernity in Africa," in *The Responsible Critic: Essays on African Literature in Honor of Professor Ben Obumelu*, ed. Isidore Diala (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2006), 5.
28. Irobi, *Why I Don't*, 82.
29. Ibid., 95.
30. Ibid.
31. Said, *Reflections on Exile*, 141.
32. Olu Oguibe, "Esiaba Irobi: The Tragedy of Exile," *Maple Tree Literary Supplement* 7 (August 2010), 3.
33. Ibid., 13.
34. Ibid., 15.
35. Osu, "Eclipsed Visions," 116.
36. Irobi, *Why I Don't*, 63.
37. Ibid., 64. Irobi locates his experience in the proper historical context by his reverberative allusion to Langston Hughes's famous contemplation on the frustration of African Americans' aspirations in the United States, "Harlem."
38. Irobi, *Why I Don't*, 63.
39. Ibid., 64.
40. Said, *Reflections on Exile*, 43.
41. Irobi, *Why I Don't*, 63.
42. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, 49.
43. Said, *Reflections on Exile*, 138.
44. Diala, *Esiaba Irobi's Drama*, 40, 294.
45. Irobi, *Why I Don't*, 24.
46. Ibid., 96.
47. Ibid., 97.
48. Ibid., 98.
49. Ibid., 96.
50. Ibid., 13–14.
51. F. Njubi Nesbitt, "African Intellectuals in the Belly of the Beast: Migration, Identity, and the Politics of Exile," *African Issues* 30, no. 1 (2002): 70.
52. Irobi, *Why I Don't*, 44.
53. Ibid., 97; emphasis in the original.
54. Maxine L. Montgomery, "Got on My Travelling Shoes: Migration, Exile, and Home in Toni Morrison's 'A Mercy,'" *Journal of Black Studies* 42, no. 4 (2011): 628.

55. Irobi, *Why I Don't*, 97.
56. Irobi, *Cotyledons*, 30–31.
57. Irobi, *Why I Don't*, 99.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid., 95.

61. Oguiibe, “Esiaba Irobi,” 11.

62. Interestingly, this recognition of his own trenchant mortality in the death of a close friend also characterizes the first lines of Irobi’s 2006 elegy for the Nigerian writer and scholar, Ezenwa-Ohaeto:

“There are few of us left. Soon there will be none.”

These were the first words that crossed my mind
when I heard of your death. (34)

In this poem, Irobi associates exile with poison, refers to the United States as a “mad camp,” and flaunts his mortality in defiance of death: “I lie on my bed and spread my bones to God to count.” Esiaba Irobi, “Elegy for Ezenwa-Ohaeto,” *Matatu* 33 (2006): 36.

63. Irobi, *Why I Don't*, 13.
64. Ibid., 106.
65. Ibid.

66. Ibid., 75. Georgina Ehuriah observes that the American University in Yola, Nigeria, offered Irobi a job in 2008 and that he intended to accept the appointment after tidying up some private matters, including the condition of his health.

67. Ibid.
68. Ibid., 76.
69. Ibid., 78.
70. Ibid.
71. Ibid., 75.
72. Ibid., 99.
73. Ibid., 100.

74. Ashcroft and Ahluwalia, *Edward Said*, 55

75. Esiaba Irobi, *Nwokedi* (Enugu: Abic, 1991), 94.

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This essay collection examines the representations of migration in African literature, film, and other visual media. Inspired by the proliferation of texts focused on this theme and the ongoing migration crises, essays in the volume probe the ways in which African cultural productions shape and are shaped by the migration debates, the contributions these productions make to an understanding of globalization, and the stylistic features of the works. The texts analyzed here include important recent writings and films that have yet to receive considerable scholarly attention, by artists such as Chimamanda Adichie, Teju Cole, Leila Aboulela, Noo Saro-Wiwa, and Marzek Allouache.

Current scholarship on migration largely focuses on the journey from Third World spaces to the First World, thereby radically limiting our understanding of migratory flows. This project works against this lopsided analysis of migration and considers narratives of return as central to migratory flows. The book also invests in underanalyzed and underrepresented diasporas on the continent including the Lusophone and Indian diasporas. Unlike much scholarship on migration in African cultural studies, which tends to focus primarily on a genre (literature), a region, or a specific language, the current book emphasizes Africa's geographical and linguistic diversity by being attentive to Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone areas, as well as an array of texts encompassing various genres.

"African Migration Narratives carefully differentiates the recent proliferation of migrant writing from earlier modes of expression. The result is a collection of rich essays on important contemporary writers and filmmakers. The collection is timely, considering the migrant crises that concern Africa and its diaspora in significant ways. While it uses some well-known twenty-first century writers, the book also brings to the foreground incredibly creative artists that have largely been ignored in African studies."

—Evan Mwangi, Northwestern University

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