BETWEEN ROOTS AND ROUTES

Narratives of Diaspora, Identity and Belonging

EDITED BY:
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2025

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Between Roots and Routes is a significant contribution to the fields of postcolonial studies, diaspora studies, and comparative literature. It offers a nuanced, theoretically sophisticated, and geographically diverse exploration of how individuals and communities navigate identity in a world defined by movement. The book successfully demonstrates that the tension between roots and routes is not a problem to be solved but a generative space where new understandings of self, community, and belonging are continuously forged. It is an essential resource for scholars and students interested in the enduring power of literature to make sense of displacement and imagine more inclusive futures.

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FOREWORD

> "Their Maker, she said, gives them the sky to carry because they are strong. These people do not know who they are, but if you see a lot of trouble in your life, it is because you were chosen to carry part of the sky on your head."
>
> **— Edwidge Danticat, Breath, Eyes, Memory, p.25)**

Since we aim at questioning Roots and Routes, paths and identities, we will apply in this incipit the famous words of Edouard Glissant: "Agis dans ton lieu, pense avec le monde (Act in your place, think with the world)." We will also, here and there, infuse our remarks with words from our oral tradition, from our Caribbean space. Speaking from Guadeloupe and as a French-speaking Caribbean, to an Eastern intelligentsia, and to readers from all over the world, is both a revolutionary act and a restorative act. Revolution and Reparation: two essential concepts for the reclamation of our spaces and the reweaving of our futures.

Since it is time today to rethink our beings in the world that is deteriorating, that has slowly left the precarious balance around the great tables of the leaders of this world, the status quo, where the victors were decision-makers for the global well-being, it is high time to give more amplitude and resonance to the texts, the thoughts, the reflections that come from latitudes formerly subordinated by Histories rewritten by the monsters of devastation and the turbulence of diversionary narratives. Thus, writing is a mission that we must fulfill like many of our elders, our peers, the pioneers of our imaginations.

Literature offers an exploration of potential unexplored worlds at the intersection of the depths, hitherto unfathomable, of gushing virgin intimacies with our own spaces, of the current mutations of our reconfigurations and transfigurations, exploding in centrifugal and centripetal alé-vini (back and forth movements) and projections toward our visions.

Movements in Poiesis

This first quarter of the 21st century is marked by the rise of fascism, fundamentalism, and protectionism, which have yet to fully manifest themselves. Viewing the world from the West,

the geopolitics of violence has never been so lucidly proclaimed by the nation-states dominating the political and economic chessboard. One might think that everything that was sung to us, as children of the homelands of human rights, suddenly becomes obsolete. However, it seems to us that a politically correct discourse was maintained for decades following the horror of the Holocaust, and the concentration and extermination camps. Diplomacy and human rights have become the spearheads of the Western arsenal for liberating the circulation of goods, as people were enabled with passports. This is a philanthropic, messianic, and humanist mythology that serves as a sounding board for economic expansion, allowing the continuation and strengthening of the "civilizing," imperialist, and assimilationist colonial thrust. The 20th century thus saw borders open through wars, persecutions, and instabilities due to the multiplicity of colonizations: migratory hemorrhages resulted from them, whether they be extraterritorial, exodic, interurban, or internal. The paths to freedom and self-determination are numerous, as are the escape routes to a better future. Diasporas are then born, at the heart of large political entities in constant reconfiguration. Great European empires detach themselves from the appendages of populations that reach autonomy or independence and split from their motherland, to become nations in their own right. This was the case of the United States, Australia, and Quebec. These wars of secession were successful, to the point of seeing these territories equal or surpass their former lords in the race for globalization. Other annexed, colonized, and confiscated lands have no control over their destiny to this day, even after decades of ideological, armed, political, unionist, or even poietic struggle.

Transhumance, Transgression, Translation

All these displaced populations, willingly or forcibly, leave their native land, scarified or re-stratified, to nest in the very places from which the torturers of their ancestors originate. In a recent publication — Melyon-Reinette, S. "BUMIDOM, WINDRUSH & BÓTPIPOL, a virtual curation of circular destinies in the Blackened Atlantic", Modern & Contemporary France, 2025 — a circularity of destinies emerges at the heart of postcolonialities and the artworks that result from them. Our essay substantiates the identity gap embedded in the familial, cultural, and civilizational fabrics that now stretch between the former colonies and their ontological colonizer. The resources through which we cast our gaze and draw our conclusions are found in the plastic and visual works produced from one side to the other. These mindful, soulful, memorial or cathartic intellectual and aesthetic works, are in some cases plethoric and multifold, in others extremely rare. In the case of the BUMIDOM / the French-speaking

Caribbean, a discontinuity is observable. A unique visual iteration for a phenomenon that drains the overseas territories of their vital forces and yet has long been erased from the memories of the islanders. Those who leave betray and are forgotten. We know that some memories belong to a single shore, while others are expressed beyond the waters. Or through the waters. This difference is fundamental: for instance Haitian migrants, whose journey embraces the elements—the water, the sea, the currents—inscribe these odysseys in the DNA of the people, in the founding myths of the Diaspora and the Native land, because from one shore to the other, the continuum of the struggle for life knows no break.

Those movements, which explode, disperse, merge, distribute, and redistribute, no longer consolidate into hermetic or porous blocks, but rather into archipelago-like geopolitics. Peoples are now stretched and fragmented across the globe, their only connection being language(s), memorials, memories, and founding and refounding myths. The transhumance, crossings, trades, transshipments, and deportations of colonized, subalternized, negrified, and commodified bodies are all transgressions of reserved spaces. From the colony, formerly the exclusive zone of enslavement (prohibited on French soil during the colonial era), to the metropolises and their suburbs, now lawless zones for these same bodies, even though some were born *juris soli*. So, writing becomes vital. Giving these stories a reading becomes essential to subverting attempts to erase migratory violence. To express the transformations in hollows, in voices, in cries, is a healing process which saves and preserves from the amnesia-induced global capitalism.

Dia Speiro, Mise en abime of the Being

> *Les livres, la parole, les vieilles mémoires, les traces, les intuitions, les souvenirs bégayés… tout s'érigeait outil de cette quête du profond. Autour de moi, la colonisation avait mené discours. Elle avait nommé. Elle avait désigné. Elle avait expliqué. Elle avait installé une Histoire qui niait nos trajectoires. Elle s'était écrite dans nos silences démantelés (Chamoiseau, p. 97)[1]*

Omerta is hardly avoidable.

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[1] Translated to: "Books, speech, old memories, traces, intuitions, stuttered recollections… everything was erected as a tool in this quest for the profound. Around me, colonization had led discourse. It had named. It had designated. It had explained. It had installed a History that denied our trajectories. It had written itself in our dismantled silences" (Chamoiseau, p. 97)

Bodies are mute underground, through the depths of urban and city jails, of small-scale trade, factories, relocations, and the global market.

Diasporas create literature to express the tremors, the impulses, the shocks, the mingling, the convulsions, the fantasies, the tensions, the embraces, the fertilization, the renewal, the springs, the anger and the brawls, the risks and the imprisonments, the emancipations and the bruises, the anamneses, the cracks, the tears, the epitomes and the hybrids, the bedsores and the keloids, the consciences and the zombifications, the brutality and the expirations…

Bodies reinvent themselves, and the first generations carry the seeds of the cauterization of the internal hemorrhage that was departure, exile, and the quest.

> *« L'étude des diasporas n'apparait plus comme un phénomène de mode mais comme un champ nouveau et interdisciplinaire (Dufoix, 1999 ; Pr.v.lakis, 1996) qui mobilise de nombreux démographes économistes, géographes, sociologues et anthropologues ». (Meyer, 2003)*

Diasporas. C'est ce qui se disperse entre entropie et tropismes.

> *Entre chaos et sillons*
>
> *Entre-deux… tiraillements.*

L'idée de Diaspora a ontologiquement été structurée autour de la binarité Centre / périphérie. Quel est le point de départ, outre le pays d'origine ? Il y a le mouvement géographique et politique, l'ombilic enterré dans le sol du pays sien, mais aussi le cordon ombilical, tel une hydre accrochée à la force de travail des partants. Il y a le positionnement singulier d'une détermination transnationale, entre deux rives, en perpétuelle conscience double. Il y a la mer intérieure qui connaît ses remous et ses ouragans. Les terres sans horizon et leurs sécheresses et leurs déserts. Il y a l'archipel des sens qui appelle l'authenticité de ceux qui savent d'où ils viennent bien que flottant entre deux espaces, encore et encore. Chaque écrivain.e, poète, artiste, reporter, cinéaste documente sa bribe d'existence et sa pièce du puzzle. Dans un monde extrêmement mouvant, où nos perceptions sont encore davantage mises à mal par les intelligences artificielles, les repères sont évanescents. En contrepoint, revenons à nos philosophes, dans nos lieux, pour le monde. Patrick Chamoiseau écrit à ce propos :

Diasporas. This is what disperses between entropy and tropisms.

> *Between chaos and furrows*
>
> *In-between... tensions.*

The idea of Diaspora has ontologically been structured around the Center/periphery binary. But now, what is the starting point, besides the country of origin? There is the geographic and

political movement, the navel buried in the soil of one's own country, but also the umbilical cord, like a hydra attached to the labor force of those leaving. There is the singular positioning of a transnational determination, between two shores, in perpetual double consciousness. There is the inland sea with its eddies and hurricanes. The lands without horizons and their droughts and deserts. There is the archipelago of the senses that calls for the authenticity of those who know where they come from, even though they float between two spaces, again and again. Each writer, poet, artist, reporter, filmmaker documents their fragment of existence and their piece of the jigswa. In an extremely shifting world, where our perceptions are further undermined by artificial intelligence, landmarks are evanescent. In counterpoint, let us return to our philosophers, in our spaces, toward the world. Patrick Chamoiseau writes to the matter:

> *Rêver-pays — Comprendre cette terre dans laquelle j'étais né devint mon exigence. J'étais en elle et elle était en moi. Aller en elle, c'était aller en moi en une boucle sans rivage. Je voulus oublier ce que je savais d'elle, retrouver comme dessous une ruine sa chair véritable dont mes propres chairs avaient fait leur tissu. Je revins au magma de ses émergences. (Chamoiseau, Écrire en Pays Dominé, p. 97)[2]*

In/Fringe. Across the Margins

Roots and Routes are (under)taken by many peoples, from one land to another, from one language to another, from one space of ideation to another. This volume collects and brings together articles that dissect narratives, histories, visions from Oriental, North African, and Middle Eastern minds. These narratives fill a gap in our ethnocentric and fragmented perceptions of the world. Looking at the world from the West when one comes from dominated territories means going beyond conceptual, philosophical, and ideological dissonances. The authors in the corpus of references cited throughout this volume belong to the Black World, the former British colonies, the Africas, the cultural studies, and the subaltern studies. They are African American, French-Caribbean and Caribbean-American, and Caribbean-British. British-Guyanese Paul Gilroy, Martinican thinkers Frantz Fanon and Edouard Glissant, Indian Homi Bhabha, African-American writers Langston Hughes, Toni Morrison and Maya Angelou, Haitian-American writer Edwidge Danticat, British-Nigerian Bernadine Evaristo, British-Kittitian writer and playwright Caryl Phillipps… they are also North African or Middle Eastern such as Morrocan writer Tahar Ben Jelloun, French-Senegalese filmmaker Mati Diop, Algerian

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[2] Dreaming (a / as a / in a) Country — Understanding this land in which I was born became my requirement. I was in it and it was in me. To go into it was to go into myself in a loop without shores. I wanted to forget what I knew of it, to find, as if beneath a ruin, its true flesh from which my own flesh had made its fabric. I returned to the magma of its emergences. (Chamoiseau, Écrire en Pays Dominé, p. 97)

writer Leïla Sabar, British-Pakistanese writer Hanif Kureishi, French-Chadian Mahamat-Saleh Haroun, etc. The recurring notions and concepts in the volume remind us of a common destiny that invites us to rebirths through fluidity and movement, to flexibility through in-betweennes, refusal of fixity through opacity and plasticity, to contravening alienation and fragmentation, to proclaiming and owning creativity and re-tradition, belonging and diasporities, etc.

Thus, from one margin to another, from one postcolonial area to another, our stories interbreed and the references that allow us to think ourselves about the world, our universes and our identities, our imaginations through or versus mainstream cultures all belong to a set of decolonial currents that transcend diasporic currents. Despite histories that have often been on first-name terms, the Americas and the Africas, the Souths from the West Indies to the Orients, notably in France through Pan-Africanism, we must constantly put the work back on the loom to reweave our decolonized identities and conjugate our narratives, initiating new circulations from oriental literatures to Caribbean/American ones. Our literatures must be the testimonies and the meshes of renewed postcolonial philosophies and imaginaries. More than provincializing scholarly and literary knowledge tapping solely into our leading, globally shared masterpieces, we need to tighten the nets of conceptual corpuses to elevate and supersede civilisational boundaries, in a circular movement. *Between Roots and Routes* is one more pioneering intake, and one out of many more.

Accorde ta voix à la durée du monde

— Edouard Glissant

Dr. Stéphanie Melyon-Reinette
Sociologist and Independent scholar,
Curator and performer.

PREFACE

In recent decades, the question of belonging has become one of the most urgent concerns in literature, culture, and politics. As populations move in response to war, poverty, climate change, and inequality, and as borders tighten in the name of national security, identity itself has become increasingly unstable. The experience of displacement now defines much of the modern world. It shapes not only the lives of migrants, refugees, and exiles but also the cultural imagination of communities who remain at home yet live with the awareness of mobility and loss. *Between Roots and Routes: Narratives of Diaspora, Identity, and Belonging* was conceived as a collective effort to explore how literature captures and transforms this condition of movement.

The volume brings together scholars who share a deep interest in how narrative forms engage with migration, hybridity, and the inheritance of history. The project began in a series of conversations about the persistence of colonial legacies in language and culture, and about how writers and artists translate the experience of exile into creative expression. It grew from the conviction that literature does not merely depict displacement but also provides a way of thinking through it. Writing becomes a means of translating the self across languages, histories, and geographies, and of giving form to what might otherwise remain unspeakable.

From the beginning, the guiding questions were both simple and profound. How can storytelling preserve memory in the face of historical erasure? What happens to language when it is uprooted from its homeland? How do individuals and communities negotiate between the need for continuity and the inevitability of change? And how might literature help us imagine forms of belonging that are not bound by territory or origin? The chapters gathered in this volume respond to these questions from multiple cultural, historical, and theoretical perspectives.

At its heart, *Between Roots and Routes* approaches diaspora not as a static category but as a living process. Diaspora describes both the scattering of people and the weaving together of new connections. It is a condition defined by tension: between memory and forgetting, between attachment and displacement, between the preservation of heritage and the demands of adaptation. To live in diaspora is to inhabit a space of in-betweenness, where identity is continually negotiated and remade. Yet this in-betweenness is not only a source of pain or

nostalgia. It also carries the potential for renewal, for imagining new modes of relation, and for discovering new languages of self and community.

The title of the book, *Between Roots and Routes*, captures this dual movement of continuity and transformation. "Roots" evoke the desire to remain connected to the histories and traditions that anchor one's sense of self. "Routes," on the other hand, suggest the journeys that carry individuals across borders and into new spaces of encounter. The tension between these two terms defines the experience of migration, but it also defines the creative energy of diasporic expression. Writers who inhabit this space turn dislocation into invention. They craft hybrid languages, blend memory with imagination, and reshape the boundaries of culture and belonging.

The theoretical foundations of this volume draw upon a wide field of postcolonial and cultural studies. Stuart Hall's reflections on cultural identity as "a matter of becoming as well as being" illuminate the way diaspora transforms the very idea of subjectivity. Homi Bhabha's notion of the "third space" provides a framework for understanding hybridity as a generative form of cultural negotiation. Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* adds a vision of identity as relational, rooted not in singular origin but in exchange and connection. Together, these ideas allow us to see diaspora as an ongoing dialogue between histories and futures, between inherited trauma and creative possibility.

In thinking about diaspora, this book also engages with memory as both burden and resource. The past for diasporic subjects is rarely whole. It often arrives in fragments: stories half remembered, languages partially lost, photographs faded by time. Yet literature and art transform these fragments into living archives. They restore voices that history has silenced and connect individual experience with collective remembrance. Writers such as Leïla Sebbar and Assia Djebar have shown how personal testimony can resist colonial amnesia, while authors like Edwidge Danticat and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie reimagine memory as a space of dialogue across generations and geographies. The chapters collected here continue this tradition, exploring how narrative becomes an act of survival and an instrument of critique.

The scope of the volume is transnational and multilingual. It brings together analyses of North African, Middle Eastern, African, Caribbean, and diasporic American texts, spanning historical periods from colonial rule to contemporary globalization. The diversity of its subjects reflects the global reach of diasporic experience. Yet the book's coherence lies in its shared

interest in how movement reshapes identity and how literature makes sense of that movement. Each contribution approaches diaspora as both a condition of fragmentation and a field of creativity. Each chapter reveals how writers transform silence into speech, alienation into connection, and loss into new forms of belonging.

In assembling this volume, my aim was not only to present individual case studies but to create a conversation among them. The essays speak to one another across languages and borders, revealing patterns of convergence and divergence in the global story of displacement. A text from Algeria may resonate unexpectedly with one from Nigeria or the Caribbean; a memoir of exile might echo the themes of a speculative novel about climate migration. These intersections remind us that diaspora is not a singular experience but a shared condition, one that cuts across histories and geographies.

The contributors to this collection come from varied academic and cultural backgrounds, and their approaches are as diverse as their subjects. Some draw on postcolonial and decolonial theory, others on cultural memory studies, gender analysis, or comparative literature. Their essays are united by a commitment to understanding how identity is continually remade in the face of movement and loss. I am profoundly grateful to each of them for their intellectual generosity and the care with which they engaged with this shared project. Their collective work turns a set of questions into a sustained dialogue about the meanings of diaspora in our time.

This project has also been shaped by the intellectual communities that nurtured it. The ideas that animate these pages were refined in classrooms, seminars, and informal conversations that often blurred the boundaries between teaching and research. I owe much to students whose curiosity and insight deepened my own understanding of diaspora as both a theoretical concept and a lived experience. I also wish to acknowledge the colleagues who contributed ideas, feedback, and encouragement at various stages. Their presence made the work of editing a collective journey rather than a solitary task.

Between Roots and Routes emerges at a moment when the very notions of identity and belonging are being contested globally. The rise of nationalist discourses, the politics of exclusion, and the crises of migration have made it increasingly urgent to think about how people live with displacement. Literature does not offer solutions to these challenges, but it allows us to feel their complexity and to imagine alternatives. By reading stories of exile and

return, of memory and adaptation, we come to see that belonging can take many forms, and that mobility does not necessarily mean loss. The act of narrating one's journey becomes a form of resistance against erasure and a declaration of presence in a world that too often denies visibility to those who move.

This book does not aim to provide definitive answers. Rather, it invites reflection and dialogue. It asks readers to consider how identities are shaped by movement and how the spaces between cultures can become sites of creativity rather than conflict. The chapters show that while diaspora often begins with separation, it can lead to connection. The routes people travel may diverge, but they also intersect, producing new constellations of meaning and solidarity. In tracing these movements, the essays affirm the capacity of literature to make sense of displacement and to transform fragmentation into relation.

In essence, *Between Roots and Routes* is a book about the resilience of the human spirit. It demonstrates how, in the midst of dislocation, individuals continue to create meaning, preserve memory, and seek connection. It is also a book about the power of storytelling to bridge distances—between languages, between histories, and between people. By reading across these borders, we come to understand that identity is not something we possess but something we enact and remake. The contributors to this volume remind us that to live in diaspora is not only to endure loss but also to participate in the ongoing creation of culture.

I hope that this collection will speak to scholars and students of literature, as well as to anyone interested in the ways in which stories cross borders and shape our shared humanity. It is offered in the spirit of dialogue, curiosity, and collaboration, in the belief that reading itself is a form of encounter. The essays that follow invite us to listen across difference, to recognize our interdependence, and to imagine forms of belonging that are open, dynamic, and inclusive.

Between Roots and Routes affirms that to think about diaspora is to think about the world as a space of relation rather than separation. It is to acknowledge that while our histories may begin in different places, our futures are intertwined. May this book serve as a small contribution to that understanding.

Nassima Amirouche

Editor

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book grew out of conversations, collaborations, and shared commitments that extended far beyond the confines of individual research. It is the product of many voices, and I owe a profound debt of gratitude to those who helped shape its journey from an idea into a finished volume.

I wish to thank first and foremost the contributors whose essays form the heart of *Between Roots and Routes.* Their intellectual generosity, dedication, and patience throughout the process of writing, revising, and refining their chapters made this collective endeavor possible. Each of them brought a distinct vision to the project, and together they created a conversation that is both intellectually rich and deeply human.

I am equally grateful to my colleagues and friends who supported the project at various stages. Their insights, suggestions, and encouragement sustained me through the long process of editing and revision. I also thank the peer readers and scholars who offered valuable feedback on the conceptual design and structure of the volume. Their careful reading helped clarify the scope and strengthen the coherence of the book.

Special thanks are due to the institutions and academic communities that provided the space, time, and resources necessary for this work. I am indebted to the university that fostered this project and to the research centers that continue to nurture interdisciplinary and comparative scholarship. Their commitment to dialogue across languages and cultures mirrors the spirit of this book.

My gratitude also extends to students, past and present, whose curiosity and insight have continually renewed my faith in the importance of literature as a bridge between worlds. Many of the questions explored in this volume were first raised in the classroom, and their perspectives reminded me that the study of diaspora is not only an academic pursuit but also a way of understanding our shared humanity.

I would like to acknowledge the editors and staff involved in the production of this volume for their professionalism and care. Their work ensured that the book reached its final form with clarity and precision.

To all who contributed to this journey in ways large and small, I offer my deepest thanks. *Between Roots and Routes* is, in many ways, a collective achievement. It stands as a testament to what can be created when scholars, readers, and writers come together in a spirit of dialogue, curiosity, and hope.

INTRODUCTION

Diasporic writing occupies a vital space in contemporary literature, offering a window into how identity, belonging, and memory are transformed by movement. Through stories of migration, exile, and return, it reveals that displacement is never merely geographical. It affects language, emotion, and history, reshaping both personal and collective consciousness. The essays gathered in *Between Roots and Routes: Narratives of Diaspora, Identity, and Belonging* explore these dynamics across multiple regions and traditions, showing how literature records the fractures of departure while imagining new possibilities of relation and renewal.

This volume approaches diaspora as a condition of tension and creation. It brings together works that confront the pain of separation while affirming the capacity for reinvention that emerges from displacement. The chapters trace how the disruptions of colonialism, migration, and globalization continue to shape cultural memory and identity formation. Together, they illustrate that diaspora is not a fixed category but a living process through which individuals and communities continually negotiate belonging, language, and home.

The organization of the book follows both a conceptual and geographical trajectory. The first section examines the colonial and postcolonial legacies of North Africa, where the scars of domination are inscribed in language and cultural identity. The second explores hybridity and fragmented archives as creative responses to displacement. The third turns to political and intellectual exile in times of crisis, while the fourth expands the perspective to the Black Atlantic, where the sea and the city become metaphors for continuity and transformation. This movement from local histories to transnational networks mirrors the broader evolution of diasporic consciousness itself.

Part I. Colonial Legacies and Silenced Histories

The collection opens in Algeria, a country where colonial history remains deeply embedd The collection opens in Algeria, a country where colonial history remains deeply inscribed in its cultural and linguistic fabric. Nassima Amirouche's *Silenced Histories, Unspoken Wounds* reads Leïla Sebbar's *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père* (2003) as a meditation on inherited silence and linguistic fracture. Sebbar's inability to speak her father's Arabic becomes emblematic of the larger dislocation produced by colonial education and the suppression of indigenous voices. Drawing on feminist and decolonial perspectives, Amirouche

demonstrates how Sebbar transforms personal memory into a form of resistance against both patriarchal nationalism and the enduring power of French cultural hegemony.

Continuing within the Algerian context, Sanaa Fatma Zohra Zair and Abdelmounaim Khanfri's *Unveiling Colonial Legacies: Gender, Identity, and Cultural Displacement in Abdelhamid Benhedouga's La mise à nu* extends this discussion by placing questions of gender and cultural displacement at the center of Algeria's postcolonial condition. Their chapter examines how Benhedouga's novel exposes the lingering psychic and social effects of colonial domination, particularly as they intersect with women's identities and bodies. Through a nuanced analysis of female consciousness, alienation, and the search for moral agency, Zair and Khanfri reveal how *La mise à nu* dramatizes the struggle to redefine selfhood in a society marked by both colonial residue and patriarchal constraint. The chapter situates Benhedouga within the wider tradition of Maghrebi writers who interrogate the cultural fractures left by empire while imagining new forms of resistance and renewal.

Together, these two chapters foreground Algeria as a crucial site for understanding how colonialism continues to shape identity, gender, and language in the postcolonial imagination. They lay the historical and emotional groundwork for the rest of the volume, illustrating how the legacy of empire persists in memory and narrative. By tracing the intricate relationships among language, trauma, and cultural reclamation, this first part anchors the collection in the specificities of Algerian experience while opening it toward broader questions of decolonization and diaspora.

Part II. Hybridity, Fragmentation, and Diasporic Archives

If the first part of the volume examines the enduring weight of colonial histories, the second turns to the creative transformations that emerge from their aftermath. Here, hybridity and fragmentation are not viewed as symptoms of loss but as generative principles through which diasporic subjects reimagine identity, history, and belonging. The chapters in this section explore how literary and cinematic forms of hybridity challenge the authority of linear, Eurocentric narratives and instead foreground fluidity, multiplicity, and reinvention.

Selma Bekkai's *Fragments against the Grain* provides the conceptual anchor for this section. Her chapter argues that hybridity is less a harmonious blending of traditions than a critical disruption of dominant ways of knowing and representing history. Drawing on the work of theorists such as Stuart Hall, Édouard Glissant, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Walter Mignolo,

Bekkai situates hybridity as a decolonial method—a strategy that resists closure and insists on the coexistence of multiple temporalities. Through close readings of writers and filmmakers such as Leïla Sebbar, Hanif Kureishi, Tahar Ben Jelloun, Mati Diop, and Mahamat-Saleh Haroun, she demonstrates how diasporic narratives fracture inherited forms of storytelling. These works refuse linear chronology and coherent identity, opting instead for montage, fragmentation, and repetition. By doing so, they construct archives rooted in movement and affect, where memory circulates across languages, bodies, and geographies. Bekkai ultimately suggests that hybridity functions not as a reconciliation between cultures but as a space of productive tension, a method for imagining the unfinished and the in-between.

Zahra Demmane's chapter, *Rooted Yet Adrift: Namelessness in Jhumpa Lahiri's Whereabouts*, extends this exploration by turning to the aesthetics of anonymity and silence. Her reading of Lahiri's novel foregrounds how the absence of names and identifiable settings becomes a profound commentary on the condition of diasporic existence. Stripped of clear markers of origin, Lahiri's characters inhabit a world of shifting boundaries where belonging cannot be fixed to place or identity. For Demmane, this namelessness embodies both alienation and emancipation: it signals the loss of stable cultural coordinates yet opens a space for self-invention beyond national or linguistic constraints. Drawing on Homi Bhabha's notion of "unhomeliness" and Amin Maalouf's reflections on plural identity, Demmane interprets Lahiri's stylistic choices as a refusal of essentialism. Her analysis shows how the erasure of names transforms the text into a meditation on invisibility and resilience, where absence itself becomes a language of resistance.

Youcef Zineddine Mostefaoui's *Memory, Voice, and Diasporic Identity in Edwidge Danticat's The Dew Breaker and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah* broadens the discussion to the intersections of race, gender, and transnational memory. His comparative approach reveals how diasporic writing reconstructs identity through the act of storytelling, where remembering becomes both a personal and communal gesture. In Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*, fragmented narratives of exile and violence weave together individual testimonies into a collective archive of trauma and recovery. In *Americanah*, Adichie explores how migration reshapes not only cultural identity but also the politics of race and self-representation. Mostefaoui argues that both writers transform memory into a dynamic and forward-looking force: their protagonists revisit the past not to dwell in loss but to negotiate belonging within new cultural landscapes.

The chapters in this section reframe hybridity and fragmentation as forms of creative resistance. They show that instability, far from signifying weakness or uncertainty, becomes the very ground upon which diasporic identities are built. Through formal innovation and narrative experimentation, these works illustrate how the fractured experience of displacement generates new aesthetic languages capable of holding multiplicity without erasure. Part II thus moves beyond the colonial wound toward the imaginative possibilities of relation, demonstrating that diaspora, in its constant movement, continues to produce fresh ways of thinking, remembering, and belonging.

Part III. Exile, State Collapse, and Intellectual Displacement

If the previous section explores hybridity as a creative response to fragmentation, the third part turns to the darker realities of political collapse and forced exile. Here, displacement is not merely a metaphorical condition but a lived experience shaped by violence, repression, and dislocation. The chapters in this section examine how literature transforms the trauma of exile into an act of remembrance and critique, revealing how writing can testify to political catastrophe while envisioning forms of ethical and intellectual resilience.

Saliha Benkechida's chapter places Khaled Khalifa's *No Knives in the Kitchens of This City* in conversation with Omar El Akkad's *American War*. By reading Syrian authoritarianism alongside a speculative American civil conflict, Benkechida exposes exile as a continuum that extends from internal repression to global displacement. Both narratives portray societies unraveling under the weight of war and despotism, where public decay seeps into private life, corroding memory, intimacy, and identity. Through a comparative lens, Benkechida shows how literature functions as a counter-archive that documents the human cost of violence while preserving the faint but vital possibility of renewal. Her chapter highlights how acts of narration themselves become gestures of survival—ways of reclaiming agency and meaning amid historical devastation.

Samir Ferhi and Sarah Chabane Chaouch's *Estrangement as Insight: Edward Said and the Ethics of Exile* shifts the focus from political to intellectual displacement. Reading Said's *Out of Place* alongside his essays in *Representations of the Intellectual* and "Intellectual Exile," they argue that exile for Said is not solely a state of loss but a mode of consciousness. Estrangement, in this sense, becomes a vantage point for critical reflection, allowing the exiled thinker to resist the seductions of belonging and to question dominant forms of authority. Ferhi

and Chaouch demonstrate how Said turns displacement into a moral and epistemological position from which to critique both Western imperial narratives and the narrow essentialisms of nationalist thought. Exile thus emerges as a paradoxical form of freedom—painful yet generative, isolating yet intellectually expansive.

Together, these chapters reveal how literature and theory reimagine exile as both a wound and a resource. They show that the experience of being "out of place," whether imposed by state collapse or embraced as a stance of resistance, can open new horizons of understanding. Through Khalifa's haunting depictions of political decay and Said's meditations on the ethics of estrangement, Part III illuminates how displacement transforms into a site of insight and creativity.

Part IV. The Black Atlantic and the Redefinition of Home

The final section of the volume extends the discussion of diaspora into the Black Atlantic, where histories of enslavement, migration, and cultural renewal intertwine. In this part, the concept of home is reimagined across temporal and geographical boundaries, moving from the trauma of displacement toward the possibility of reconstruction. The chapters explore how African and Afro-diasporic writers turn the legacy of forced movement into a source of creative power, transforming historical wounds into collective memory and continuity.

Salah Eddine Aaid and Kenza Laichi's chapter examines the motif of water in the works of Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou, Bernardine Evaristo, and Yaa Gyasi. They trace how the ocean, once a symbol of loss and the haunting violence of the Middle Passage, evolves into a metaphor of renewal, memory, and return. By reading the sea as both trauma and transcendence, Aaid and Laichi reveal how Black diasporic literature transforms suffering into resilience. The movement of water becomes a language of survival, connecting generations across continents and centuries. Through this recurring imagery, the authors show how the Atlantic, once a site of rupture, becomes a space of relation where ancestral memory and future imagination converge.

Michael Antonucci's essay on Jeffery Renard Allen's *Rails under My Back* situates the novel within the literary and sociological traditions of Chicago, placing it in conversation with Richard Wright's urban narratives and the seminal study *Black Metropolis*. Antonucci traces the transition from industrial to postindustrial America, revealing how African American fiction interrogates the spatial and structural forms of inequality that shape modern urban life. His

reading highlights how Allen's complex, polyphonic narrative engages with themes of faith, community, and mobility, envisioning new forms of solidarity amid urban fragmentation. By blending sociological realism with lyrical experimentation, Allen's novel and Antonucci's analysis capture the enduring tension between alienation and the pursuit of belonging within Black modernity.

Ounissa Ait Benali closes the volume with her study of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Arrangers of Marriage*. Her chapter focuses on the intersections of displacement, gender, and adaptation, revealing how Adichie redefines the meaning of home within the Nigerian diaspora. The protagonist's struggle to reconcile tradition and modernity mirrors the broader negotiation of identity faced by diasporic subjects living between worlds. Through Ait Benali's reading, home emerges not as a fixed location but as a dynamic process continually shaped by migration, memory, and cultural encounter. By centering the feminine experience of diaspora, this final chapter expands the discussion of belonging to include the intimate, domestic, and emotional dimensions of transnational life.

Viewed together, the chapters in this section transform the notion of diaspora from a story of rupture into one of creative continuity. They show that the search for home is never an act of simple return but an ongoing practice of reconstruction and renewal, a continuous effort to make meaning across histories of loss and survival. By ending with the voices of the Black Atlantic and the Nigerian diaspora, the volume circles back to its central question: how can literature articulate belonging in a world shaped by movement and memory? The answer, suggested throughout these pages, lies in recognizing that diaspora is not a single narrative but a constellation of journeys, each carrying the echoes of the past while imagining new horizons of relation and hope.

Building on this idea, *Between Roots and Routes: Narratives of Diaspora, Identity, and Belonging* invites readers to view diaspora as both a historical condition and a living, evolving process. Across its chapters, displacement appears not only as a wound left by colonialism, war, or forced migration but also as a fertile ground for creativity, remembrance, and renewal. Each contribution approaches this condition from a distinct perspective, exploring how literature captures the experience of living between worlds through silence, hybridity, fragmentation, and the ongoing redefinition of home.

The movement of the book from colonial Algeria to the global circuits of the Black Atlantic mirrors the very trajectory of diaspora itself. It begins with the inherited silences of colonialism, moves through the hybrid expressions of fragmented identities, engages with the political and intellectual challenges of exile, and finally reaches renewed visions of belonging. This progression underscores how writers transform exile into testimony, memory into resistance, and displacement into new forms of relation and creativity.

Together, the studies in this collection remind us that the history of diaspora is inseparable from the history of the modern world. In an age marked by mobility and cultural interconnection, the search for belonging has become a defining human experience. Literature offers one of the most powerful means of understanding this experience because it gives voice to the displaced, allowing them to speak, to remember, and to imagine futures that transcend the limits of geography and time.

In closing, the works gathered here affirm that identity is never singular, that memory is always in motion, and that belonging is continuously remade through the act of storytelling. Diaspora, in all its complexity, stands as a testament to human endurance and imagination. It shows that to live between roots and routes is not to remain divided, but to find meaning and continuity in the very act of movement. As a collective scholarly endeavor, this volume contributes to the broader conversations in postcolonial and comparative literary studies, offering a space where theory and narrative converge to illuminate the ways in which literature redefines belonging in an interconnected and unsettled world.

PART ONE

Colonial Legacies and Silenced Histories

CHAPTER 1

Silenced Histories, Unspoken Wounds: Language, Erasure and Postcolonial Inheritance in Leïla Sebbar's *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père* (2003)

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Abstract

Leïla Sebbar's *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père* (2003), is a poignant exploration of the enduring wounds of colonialism and diaspora through the prism of language, silence, and fractured inheritance. Situated between Algeria and France, Sebbar's autobiographical narrative embodies the complexities of diasporic identity, where the inability to speak her Algerian father's Arabic becomes a metaphor for the broader linguistic and cultural ruptures produced by colonial rule. By analyzing Sebbar's fragmented dialogue with her father, a former Arabophone teacher compelled to educate in the colonizer's language, this chapter reveals how colonial violence persists transgenerationally, manifesting in alienation, historical erasure, and the unresolved tensions among Francophone, Arab, and Amazigh identities in postcolonial Algeria and its diasporic extensions. Engaging with Frantz Fanon's theories on language and psychic trauma, as well as Assia Djebar's literary excavations of memory, the study argues that Sebbar's work exemplifies a decolonial feminist practice—one that resists both patriarchal nationalism and the lingering hegemony of French cultural imperialism. The text's hybrid form, weaving memoir, fiction, and historical reflection, mirrors Algeria's own contested narratives, where official histories suppress marginalized voices. Finally, the study connects Sebbar's

personal testimony to contemporary debates in the Maghreb and its diasporas, from the Hirak protests' demands for linguistic justice to the ongoing struggles of Amazigh activists for recognition. By centering Sebbar's intimate testimony, this chapter illuminates the intersection of familial and national memory, showing how the personal archive becomes a site of resistance against both colonial and postcolonial silences.

Key Terms: Leïla Sebbar, Algeria, language politics, transgenerational trauma, Francophone literature, decolonial feminism, postcolonial memory.

INTRODUCTION

Leïla Sebbar's *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père* (2003) is an intimate and searing exploration of the legacies of colonial violence, as they reverberate through language, identity, and memory. In this fragmented autobiographical meditation, Sebbar confronts a deeply personal yet politically loaded absence: the fact that she cannot speak Arabic, the language of her Algerian father. This linguistic void is not merely an individual shortcoming; it is symptomatic of a colonial history that systematically dislocated Algerian identities through language policies and cultural erasure.

Sebbar's confession, "Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père," is not only the title of her text but also its central thesis. Her inability to access her father's language becomes the symbolic trace of a broader phenomenon of colonial dispossession: "Je ne peux pas dire les mots, pas même les entendre dans leur vérité" (Sebbar 2003, 17). The rupture in transmission between generations, particularly between a colonized father and a daughter raised in the colonizer's tongue, embodies a profound disinheritance. The work thus functions not only as a memoir but also as a literary critique of the psychic and cultural violence wrought by empire.

This chapter employs three conceptual lenses that guide its analysis. The first is internal exile, which describes the estrangement experienced within one's own nation or community, a condition of belonging that is at the same time marked by exclusion (Said 1994). Closely related is linguistic estrangement, the sense of alienation produced either by the inability to inhabit a language of inheritance or by the compulsion to speak in a colonial tongue (Fanon 1967). A third concept, postcolonial inheritance, highlights how unresolved colonial legacies, including silences, erasures, and fractures, continue to be transmitted across generations (Derrida 1994; Hirsch 2012). Taken together, these terms frame Sebbar's narrative and clarify how her text represents silence, fractured memory, and diasporic identity.This chapter argues that Sebbar's

exploration of linguistic estrangement constitutes a vital contribution to postcolonial and decolonial feminist discourse. Her autobiographical narrative engages with political tensions between colonizer and colonized, French and Algerian, masculine and feminine, and history and memory. In doing so, Sebbar positions herself within a genealogy of Maghrebi women writers, including Assia Djebar and Hélène Cixous, who contest official historiography and foreground embodied memory. As Valérie Orlando observes in *The Algerian New Wave: The Ongoing Postcolonial Debate* (2017), contemporary Algerian women writers continue to mobilize intergenerational memory to challenge silences within both colonial and postcolonial narratives. Sebbar's own autobiographical practice can be read as an early contribution to this ongoing literary movement, anticipating the strategies later adopted by a younger generation of Maghrebi women authors.

The hybrid form of Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père, composed of meditative vignettes, fragments, and silences, mirrors the disjointed nature of Algerian postcolonial memory. The narrative challenges not only the violence of French colonial assimilation but also the essentialist, patriarchal forms of nationalism that emerged after Algerian independence.

Through close readings, this study situates Sebbar's work within theoretical frameworks developed by Frantz Fanon, Assia Djebar, and Marianne Hirsch, while also connecting the text to contemporary cultural struggles such as the Hirak movement and Amazigh language activism. Sebbar's work exemplifies what Emma Wilson terms "writing the trace," a literary and ethical mode that does not seek to resolve trauma or recuperate wholeness, but instead bears witness to fragmentation, absence, and the lingering effects of historical violence. In her seminal work Memory and Survival: The French Cinema of Krzysztof Kieślowski, Wilson describes "writing the trace" as a form of storytelling that "refuses totality, embraces ambiguity, and foregrounds the ghostly presence of what cannot be fully recovered" (Wilson 2006, 87). This notion resonates profoundly with Sebbar's literary method in *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père*, which is built not on narrative progression or resolution, but on the insistence that what has been silenced, linguistically, historically, and emotionally, still exerts a force and still demands recognition.Sebbar's refusal to provide closure, whether in the form of a recovered Arabic, a reconciled relationship with her father, or a unified Algerian identity, mirrors the postcolonial condition of rupture and unmooring. Rather than fill in the silences left by colonial erasure, she writes around them, allowing these absences to speak in their own register. The fragmented structure of the text, composed of brief vignettes, rhetorical questions, and interrupted memories, performs this very refusal. Each fragment is a trace, a

residue of a deeper story that cannot be fully told. This approach also resists the dominant archival logic of both colonial and nationalist historiography, which seeks to codify and contain the past. Instead, Sebbar aligns herself with what Saidiya Hartman describes as "critical fabulation"—a strategy of narrating historical silence through imaginative reconstruction that foregrounds uncertainty and opacity (Hartman 2008). Sebbar's fragments do not invent what was lost but linger in its contours, suggesting that the loss itself is a vital historical and emotional truth. "Je n'écris pas pour reconstituer une mémoire, mais pour en sentir les manques," Sebbar suggests (Sebbar 2003, 41).

This writing of the trace also opens up a political space: by acknowledging that colonial trauma cannot be neatly resolved or historicized, Sebbar challenges readers to reckon with the ongoingness of that trauma. Her Arabic is not forgotten; it is unlearned, untransmitted, "pas même murmurée dans l'enfance" (Sebbar 2003, 15, never whispered in childhood. That loss haunts the text, not as a dramatic event, but as an atmospheric condition.

The ethics of Sebbar's narrative, then, lie in her attention to what remains illegible: not simply what is absent, but what cannot be fully grasped. In this, she aligns with Derrida's concept of *trace*—not as a sign of presence, but of différance, the endlessly deferred meaning that structures language and memory alike (Derrida 1976). The Arabic that haunts Sebbar's text is not merely a lost tongue; it is a trace of a lost world, a suppressed history, and a fractured identity. Her writing does not try to recover it as a stable referent, but to make its absence legible as a wound and a force. By "writing the trace," Sebbar not only refuses the myth of postcolonial reconciliation but also honors the complexity of intergenerational trauma, the unevenness of memory, and the dignity of silence. In a world where political and cultural systems still demand coherence and mastery, particularly of identity, Sebbar's aesthetic insists on fragmentation as a form of truth. This is not the melancholy of exile, but the epistemology of the unspoken. Her writing teaches us that sometimes, what matters most is not what can be said, but what is felt in the silence between words.

1. Colonial Language, Postcolonial Silence

The French colonial enterprise in Algeria was not merely an occupation of land; it was, more profoundly, an occupation of language, memory, and identity. As numerous scholars have argued, French colonialism in North Africa functioned through a deep-rooted cultural imperialism that sought to reconfigure Algerian subjectivity by dismantling indigenous modes

of knowledge, expression, and communal identity. Language, in this regard, was not a neutral medium but a battleground. As Leïla Sebbar demonstrates in *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père* (2003), the erasure of Arabic, and the concurrent marginalization of Berber (Amazigh) languages, was central to this process of colonial domination. Through the lens of her own linguistic disinheritance, Sebbar articulates the enduring afterlife of this violence, revealing how colonial language policies fracture not only national identities but also familial and psychic bonds.

Pierre Bourdieu famously described language under colonial regimes as a "medium of domination and symbolic violence," noting that linguistic hierarchies function to legitimize certain forms of knowledge and invalidate others (Bourdieu 1991, 45). In the Algerian context, this took the form of the French language being installed as the exclusive medium of state administration, public education, and intellectual legitimacy, while Arabic was either excluded or relegated to the domain of religious or domestic life. Sebbar's father, a former Arabophone schoolteacher, became a direct casualty of this linguistic colonization. Under colonial mandates, he was required to abandon Arabic and teach in French, thus participating, however unwillingly, in the machinery of cultural assimilation. Sebbar foregrounds this historical trauma through an intensely personal register. Reflecting on her father's education and career, she writes : "Il a appris le français dans l'école des colonisateurs, il l'a enseigné à son tour. Il ne m'a pas appris l'arabe. Était-ce une trahison, un oubli, ou une résignation ?" (Sebbar 2003, 25). This passage is striking for its ethical ambiguity. Rather than condemning her father outright, Sebbar offers a meditation on the impossible position of the colonized intellectual: caught between loyalty to a cultural heritage and the practical demands of survival within a colonial structure. Her father's silence, his failure or refusal to pass on Arabic, is not interpreted solely as paternal neglect. Instead, Sebbar presents it as a multilayered consequence of historical coercion, institutional violence, and psychic fatigue. Her rhetorical triad, *trahison, oubli, resignation*, captures the complex emotional and political terrain navigated by colonized subjects in the face of systemic erasure. This silence, then, is not merely generational. It signals what Frantz Fanon described as a form of "linguistic death," in which colonial subjects are stripped of their cultural world and made to inhabit a foreign tongue. "To speak a language," Fanon famously argued, "is to take on a world, a culture" (Fanon 1967, 38). In losing Arabic, Sebbar has not simply lost a communicative tool; she has been severed from an entire epistemology—a way of being, remembering, and knowing the world. The colonial imposition of French, in this light, functions

as a tool of psychic reordering, one that alienates subjects from their own histories and from each other across generations.

Moreover, Fanon elucidates the paradox faced by colonized intellectuals who internalize the colonizer's language in order to be recognized as human or rational within colonial hierarchies. "The more the black Antillean assimilates the French language," he writes, "the whiter he gets" (Fanon 1967, 18). Sebbar, a writer fluent in French and educated in its literary traditions, embodies this contradiction. She is both empowered and haunted by the language in which she writes. Her critique is not of French per se, but of the historical violence embedded in its exclusivity. She writes :"J'écris dans la langue de ma mère, la langue de l'école, mais elle est aussi la langue de la séparation, celle qui a tranché les fils entre mon père et moi" (Sebbar 2003, 39).Here, the French language becomes doubly marked: it is the medium of literary creation and maternal intimacy, but also the agent of disconnection from her paternal heritage. Sebbar's ambivalence mirrors what Abdelkebir Khatibi theorized as *la double écriture*, a form of "double writing" in which the language of the colonizer is reappropriated to express postcolonial subjectivities and subvert the narratives of empire (Khatibi 1983). Rather than reject French, Sebbar turns it into a site of tension and transformation, a language that can carry the traces of what it once attempted to erase.

The textual strategies employed by Sebbar reflect this commitment to ambiguity and spectrality. Her prose is marked by fragmentation, ellipses, rhetorical questioning, and narrative gaps—formal devices that dramatize the impossibility of resolution. These silences are not incidental; they are structured absences that give voice to what cannot be said. Anne Donadey insightfully argues that Sebbar's use of textual silence is a deliberate act of resistance: "By invoking what cannot be spoken, Sebbar's work articulates the violence of erasure without reproducing it" (Donadey 2000, 144). Rather than fabricate a coherent memory or fictionalize her father's lost language, Sebbar leaves the absence intact, allowing it to signify the depth of colonial disruption. In this regard, the titular confession *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père* becomes more than a personal admission. It is an epistemological rupture, a break in the chain of transmission, and a haunting emblem of cultural estrangement. As the daughter of a colonized father and a French mother, Sebbar occupies a liminal position, one shaped by what Marianne Hirsch has called "postmemory", the inherited memory of trauma that one did not experience directly but that structures one's identity and imagination (Hirsch 2012, 5). Her narrative does not aim to restore what is lost, but to dwell within the affective space of that loss, to trace its outlines and attend to its enduring presence.

This affective haunting aligns closely with Jacques Derrida's notion of "hauntology," a condition in which the past lingers without being fully present, and the future is shaped by what remains unresolved. For Derrida, the *trace* is not a sign of what was once there, but of what continues to disturb, to call, and to resist closure (Derrida 1994). In Sebbar's work, Arabic functions precisely in this way: not as a language to be recovered, but as a spectral presence that continues to structure her consciousness and unsettle her identity. Its absence is not a void, but a presence that saturates the narrative, demanding to be acknowledged even if it cannot be reclaimed. Thus, the silence at the heart of Sebbar's text is not passive, it is an active, resistant force. It contests the colonial fiction of assimilation, the nationalist fantasy of linguistic purity, and the liberal ideal of reconciliation. In writing this silence, Sebbar enacts a radical ethics of memory: one that refuses mastery, embraces incompleteness, and insists on the dignity of what remains unspeakable.

2. The Father Figure and the Silence of Transmission

If language is the carrier of memory, identity, and cultural legacy, then the figure of the father in *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père* becomes the embodiment of disrupted transmission. Throughout the text, Leïla Sebbar presents her father not only as a man of dignity and education, but also as a figure cloaked in reticence, emotional distance, and linguistic inaccessibility. This portrayal transcends the personal; it is an allegory for the generational silencing that occurs when colonial histories interrupt the natural flow of cultural inheritance.

Sebbar's father, born in colonized Algeria and shaped by its institutions, is described with respect and affection, but also with a palpable sense of estrangement. He is a man "intelligent, cultivé, réservé" (Sebbar 2003, 22), who rarely speaks of his past and remains emotionally elusive. His story is fragmentary, his memories guarded, and his language, Arabic, unspoken in the French household. The emotional and linguistic silence that marks his relationship with his daughter becomes emblematic of a broader historical disarticulation: the rupture between colonized fathers and their children raised in the postcolonial diaspora. Rather than construct an idealized or reconciled image of the father, Sebbar's narrative preserves the complexity of his silence. She writes:"Je ne sais pas ce qu'il a fait pendant la guerre. Il ne raconte pas. Il ne dit rien. Ni sur son enfance, ni sur ses parents. Je ne sais pas s'il a eu faim, s'il a eu peur, s'il a été humilié" (Sebbar 2003, 28). The weight of this silence is not simply biographical; it is historiographical. The father's refusal—or inability—to speak becomes a symbol of the unspoken trauma endured by Algerian men who lived through colonization, war,

and displacement. In this regard, Sebbar's work echoes the concerns of trauma theorists such as Cathy Caruth, who notes that traumatic memory often resists narration and emerges instead in fragments, silence, or repetition (Caruth 1996, 4). Her father's narrative is marked not by what is said, but by what is withheld, and it is in this withholding that the trauma becomes legible.

Moreover, the father's silence must also be read in light of gendered expectations within both colonial and postcolonial frameworks. Under French colonialism, Algerian men were frequently feminized, infantilized, or positioned as culturally backward in relation to European ideals of rationality and progress. This not only undermined their authority but distorted their capacity to be cultural transmitters in the eyes of their children. After independence, this dynamic was often reversed, with nationalist discourses idealizing paternal figures as heroic symbols of resistance, yet, paradoxically, still denying them emotional interiority. Sebbar resists both caricatures. She neither vilifies nor mythologizes her father; instead, she bears witness to his ambiguity.

The failure of intergenerational transmission in the narrative is not solely a result of colonial intervention, but also a product of its afterlife, what Marianne Hirsch terms "postmemory." Hirsch defines postmemory as "the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before, to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up" (Hirsch 2012, 5). Sebbar's postmemorial inheritance is fractured: her father does not tell stories, does not offer images, and behaves in ways that reinforce silence rather than narration. She is left not with memories, but with a haunting sense of something unspoken, a silence that structures her own identity as a French-Algerian woman. This haunting is reinforced by the recurring absence of Arabic in their familial interactions. Unlike many accounts of linguistic recovery or restoration, Sebbar does not attempt to learn Arabic within the narrative. There is no triumphant scene of reclamation. Instead, she preserves the gap. This refusal to fictionalize healing is a critical intervention into postcolonial literary conventions that often valorize linguistic or cultural reconciliation. As she writes :"Je n'ai jamais appris l'arabe, il ne me l'a jamais enseigné. L'arabe n'a pas traversé le seuil de la maison" (Sebbar 2003, 31). In this context, the father's silence is both a historical product and a generative force. It shapes Sebbar's writing, not as a lack to be filled, but as a structure around which her reflections take form. The absence of language, of stories, of memory, is not a void to be remedied, but a space that demands ethical attention. This is precisely what Homi Bhabha refers to when he writes

about the "unhomely" moment in postcolonial literature—the moment when "the private and the public, the familial and the historical, become part of each other" (Bhabha 1994, 13). Sebbar's engagement with her father is located in this unhomely space, where personal love intersects with historical trauma, and where memory is both intimate and collective.

Sebbar also critiques the nationalist expectation that Arabic, as the official language of post-independence Algeria, would serve as a unifying cultural force. Her father's complex relationship with Arabic—once the language of his intellect and pedagogy, later rendered obsolete or politicized—exposes the limits of such essentialist projects. In the postcolonial state, Arabic became a national symbol, but often in ways that excluded Tamazight speakers, diasporic subjects, and women. As Muriam Haleh Davis observes, the post-independence linguistic policy in Algeria "perpetuated hierarchies and exclusions by insisting on a single national language," ignoring the rich multilingualism of the population (Davis 2017, 92). Sebbar's father, a man once forced to abandon Arabic in favor of French, becomes a poignant example of how postcolonial language politics can reproduce the very silencing they sought to redress.

In this light, Sebbar's text offers not only a portrait of a father, but a broader meditation on the impossibility of linear transmission in contexts shaped by colonial rupture. Rather than lament the absence of a "pure" or intact inheritance, she examines the emotional and linguistic residue that silence leaves behind. This residue, though painful, becomes a form of knowledge, a space of critical reflection that resists the tidy narratives of both colonial modernity and nationalist recovery.

The fractured dialogue between father and daughter thus mirrors the fractured history of Algeria itself. Both are marked by ellipses, interruptions, and contested truths. And in preserving this fragmentation, Sebbar stages an act of literary and ethical witnessing. She does not speak for her father; she listens to his silence. She does not rewrite his memory; she holds space for its unknowability.In doing so, *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père* affirms that transmission is not always about speech. Sometimes, it is the silence itself, the unsaid, the untranslatable, that carries the weight of history. The text invites us to consider that certain inheritances, especially those forged in the crucible of colonial violence, can only be approached obliquely, through fragments, hesitations, and the unresolved tensions between affection and estrangement, speech and silence.

3. Hybrid Form and Literary Resistance

If *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père* is about the rupture of linguistic and cultural inheritance, its very form, fragmented, elliptical, non-linear, is an embodiment of that rupture. The text resists conventional narrative coherence, refusing the teleological trajectory of memory leading to resolution. Instead, Leïla Sebbar opts for a hybrid literary structure, part memoir, part reflection, part historical inquiry, that reflects the disrupted subjectivity of the postcolonial child of mixed heritage. This hybrid form is not merely an aesthetic choice; it is an act of resistance. By blurring the boundaries between genres, temporalities, and discourses, Sebbar creates a counter-narrative that challenges both the homogenizing logic of colonial historiography and the essentialist discourses of nationalist recovery.

The fragmented structure of the book mirrors the epistemic violence inflicted by colonialism, which not only displaced bodies but also dismembered histories. Colonial rule did not allow for the continuity of personal or collective narratives; instead, it imposed silences, distortions, and forced forgettings. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o reminds us, colonialism "annihilates a people's beliefs in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves" (Ngũgĩ 1986, 3). Sebbar's textual disunity mirrors this cultural and linguistic disarticulation. Rather than attempting to restore coherence, she embraces fragmentation as a narrative strategy that captures the fractured subjectivity of the postcolonial condition.

The form of *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père* comprises brief vignettes, short passages of reflection, imagined conversations, and moments of introspection. There is no linear plot, no clear beginning or end. Instead, the reader is drawn into a mosaic of impressions, memories, questions, and silences. These narrative fragments function as what Michael Rothberg calls "multidirectional memory", a form of memory that does not follow a singular path but opens onto multiple temporalities and historical contexts (Rothberg 2009). Through this structure, Sebbar performs the very thing she writes about: the impossibility of seamless transmission, the ambivalence of memory, and the lingering gaps left by colonial violence.

Her method aligns her with a lineage of Francophone Algerian women writers, most notably Assia Djebar, who have used formal experimentation as a way of refusing the constraints of both colonial and patriarchal narratives. In *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*, Djebar employs a similarly fragmented structure to weave together personal memoir, historical

documents, and imagined voices of Algerian women during the war of independence. Djebar's rejection of traditional narrative form is, as Mildred Mortimer argues, "a feminist gesture against linear, male-authored histories that erase women's experiences" (Mortimer 1997, 86). Sebbar extends this legacy. Like Djebar, she refuses to impose narrative closure or coherence on her fragmented inheritance. Instead, she makes of the broken pieces a new aesthetic form, one that bears witness to the dislocations of memory, migration, and marginalization.

This literary strategy also recalls Hélène Cixous's notion of *écriture féminine*, or "feminine writing", a style that resists fixed meaning, embraces polyphony, and privileges the body and the affective. For Cixous, *écriture féminine* is a writing "not reduced to the linear, the sequential, the teleological," but one that instead mirrors the rhythms of thought, desire, and memory (Cixous 1975, 879). Sebbar's text exemplifies this fluidity. The passages move between reflection and imagination, between philosophical inquiry and poetic evocation. Language here is not a vehicle of mastery but of multiplicity. She writes not to define but to gesture, to invoke rather than to explicate. Indeed, the indeterminacy of Sebbar's prose is what makes it so politically potent. In refusing to write a conventional autobiography, one that might culminate in reconciliation with her father or recovery of the Arabic language—she resists the narrative tropes often expected of postcolonial or diasporic writers. There is no return to origins, no neat identity recovered from the wreckage of colonialism. Instead, Sebbar writes from within the debris, acknowledging that identity is made not only of continuity but of rupture. As she observes :"Je n'ai pas de langue pour dire mon père, ni son passé, ni ce qu'il aurait voulu me transmettre" (Sebbar 2003, 42).This admission is not a defeat, but a refusal to manufacture a false wholeness. In this refusal, Sebbar engages what Edward Said called "contrapuntal reading"—a mode of thinking that holds multiple, dissonant perspectives in tension, refusing synthesis or erasure (Said 1993). Sebbar's text is contrapuntal in its very structure: it juxtaposes colonial and postcolonial histories, French and Algerian identities, maternal and paternal legacies, all without resolving their contradictions. The form becomes the message; fragmentation is not a failure, but a fidelity to lived reality.

Furthermore, the hybridity of Sebbar's writing mirrors her own subject position: the daughter of an Algerian father and a French mother, writing in French about a heritage she cannot fully access. Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity offers a useful lens here. For Bhabha, the hybrid subject disrupts binary oppositions and creates "the third space of enunciation," a space that allows for new cultural meanings to emerge (Bhabha 1994, 55). Sebbar occupies precisely such a third space, her work exists between languages, nations, and literary traditions.

The hybrid form of her writing is a reflection of this liminality: it destabilizes fixed identities and opens a space for plurality, contradiction, and becoming.

In this light, Sebbar's formal choices are deeply political. By crafting a hybrid, fragmented text, she disrupts not only colonial epistemologies but also the nationalist impulse to purify and codify identity through official languages and monolithic narratives. Her refusal to write a "whole" story, to present a coherent self, is a refusal of the very logics, colonial, patriarchal, nationalist—that seek to discipline the subject into knowable, governable forms.

4. Decolonial Feminism and the Critique of Patriarchal Nationalism

While *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père* critiques the colonial legacy of linguistic domination and cultural fragmentation, it is equally incisive in its interrogation of post-independence nationalist ideologies, particularly those that reproduce patriarchal structures and impose essentialist definitions of identity. Leïla Sebbar's work reveals how, in Algeria, the language of national liberation has often masked new forms of exclusion. Her writing aligns with a broader tradition of decolonial feminist thought that refuses to celebrate anticolonial nationalism uncritically, especially when it marginalizes women, diasporic voices, and minority cultures in the name of cultural authenticity.

In post-independence Algeria, the state implemented a policy of Arabization that aimed to restore Arabic as the national language and cultural foundation of the country. While this policy was intended as a symbolic and practical repudiation of French colonialism, it often operated through the same mechanisms of homogenization and cultural suppression that characterized colonial rule. The recognition of Tamazight (Berber) languages, for example, was delayed for decades, and many Algerians whose identities were shaped by multilingualism or diasporic displacement, like Sebbar, found themselves alienated by this monolingual nationalism. As Muriam Haleh Davis notes, the Arabization program "sought to create a new subject of history" by reconfiguring cultural and linguistic affiliations, yet it frequently silenced the plurality of Algerian voices and histories (Davis 2017, 91).

Sebbar's work can be read as a powerful critique of this logic. Her narrative does not conform to nationalist ideals of purity, origin, or unity. Instead, it is marked by ambivalence, hybridity, and refusal. She does not attempt to restore a lost Arabic identity, nor does she fully identify with French culture. Her position is one of productive in-betweenness, and it is from this liminal space that she articulates her feminist and decolonial vision.

Women occupy a central place in Sebbar's text, not as passive bearers of tradition, but as complex figures negotiating the contradictions of colonialism, patriarchy, and diaspora. Her mother, a Frenchwoman from the countryside, represents a form of rooted simplicity and maternal affection. Her father, in contrast, embodies silence, dislocation, and historical opacity. Yet Sebbar does not valorize one over the other. Instead, she writes from the tension between them, acknowledging the pain and richness of her dual inheritance. She describes herself as "fille de deux mondes," a daughter of two worlds who belongs fully to neither (Sebbar 2003, 18).Viewed in this context, Sebbar's feminist critique departs from both Eurocentric models of feminism and nationalist narratives that often cast women in symbolic roles, either as custodians of cultural authenticity or as bearers of modernity. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty has famously argued, feminist practices must be historically grounded and attentive to the specific ways in which colonialism, nationalism, and patriarchy intersect to shape women's lives (Mohanty 1988, 62). Sebbar's writing exemplifies this intersectional approach. Her portrayal of women resists simplification. They are not mere victims or heroines, but situated subjects navigating structures of domination that operate simultaneously at multiple levels, linguistic, familial, political, and historical.

Moreover, Sebbar's refusal to frame her narrative around recovery or reconciliation can be read as a decolonial feminist gesture. Decolonial feminism, as theorized by scholars such as María Lugones and Françoise Vergès, emphasizes the need to dismantle not only colonial hierarchies but also the gendered and racialized logics that underpin them. Vergès in particular critiques the way nationalist discourses often conscript women into roles of symbolic maternity, figures who guarantee the transmission of national culture while being denied agency in defining it (Vergès 1999). Sebbar resists this paradigm. Her voice is not the voice of a nationalist daughter recovering the father's tongue, but of a woman insisting on the right to remain in the space of non-belonging, to speak in fragments, to write without closure. Indeed, Sebbar's narrative is structured around the very impossibility of a unified identity. Rather than position herself as the inheritor of a singular Algerian legacy, she insists on the discontinuities and contradictions that mark her subjectivity. She writes:"Je suis la fille de mon père, mais je n'ai pas sa langue. Je suis la fille de ma mère, mais je n'ai pas son pays" (Sebbar 2003, 45).

This dual negation, neither language nor country fully hers, becomes a space of critical agency. It allows Sebbar to articulate a politics of refusal: a rejection of binary logics, of enforced belonging, of narrative closure. In this sense, her work aligns with the politics of what Sara Ahmed calls "feminist killjoys", those who disrupt the comfort of dominant narratives by

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insisting on the complexities, ambivalences, and discomforts of lived experience (Ahmed 2010). Sebbar refuses to be a good daughter of either colonial modernity or postcolonial nationalism. She speaks as a woman in-between, and it is in this in-betweenness that her feminist critique emerges most forcefully. Her decision to center women, mothers, grandmothers, unnamed others, further destabilizes the patriarchal structure of historical transmission. In place of paternal genealogies or nationalist mythologies, Sebbar constructs an alternative archive of memory that privileges emotion, silence, and bodily experience. Her focus on the maternal is not sentimental; it is political. It reclaims the everyday textures of women's lives—their languages, gestures, absences, as sources of historical knowledge. In doing so, she aligns with Assia Djebar's commitment to recovering the "female voice of history," the voice that has long been drowned out by masculine scripts of war and nation (Djebar 1985, 206).

Sebbar's feminist intervention is not only thematic but formal. As explored in the previous section, her fragmented structure, refusal of narrative resolution, and hybrid genre enact a resistance to the linear, patriarchal logic of official historiography. The very act of writing becomes, for Sebbar, a mode of feminist resistance. She does not restore the past; she writes from its ruins, acknowledging both the pain and the possibility that remain.

5. Memory, Archive, and the Personal as Political

Leïla Sebbar's *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père* is more than a personal meditation on linguistic estrangement, it is a deliberate act of archival reclamation. In the absence of official histories that reflect her own hybrid identity, Sebbar turns inward, constructing what could be called a "counter-archive" from fragments of memory, silence, and absence. Her text challenges dominant modes of history writing—those that privilege coherence, chronology, and national legitimacy, and instead reclaims the personal as a legitimate and necessary site of political knowledge. By doing so, Sebbar participates in a broader movement within postcolonial and feminist thought that understands memory not as a repository of facts, but as a contested terrain where identities are shaped, histories are constructed, and silences become political acts.

The idea that the personal is political is foundational to feminist epistemology, and Sebbar's work affirms this principle by positioning her own life and linguistic alienation as a lens through which the legacy of colonialism can be read. Her testimony is not an isolated

confession, but a relational and historical narrative shaped by geopolitical violence. She does not aim to reconstruct a complete past; instead, she exposes its incompleteness, offering memory as a site where affect, history, and identity converge. In this way, her work resonates with Michel Foucault's concept of "subjugated knowledges", forms of knowledge that have been disqualified or rendered illegitimate by dominant regimes of truth (Foucault 1980, 82). Sebbar's narrative reclaims these marginalized experiences, not by inserting them into the official archive, but by writing around and against that archive. This counter-archival gesture is most evident in Sebbar's treatment of silence. Where the traditional historical archive privileges speech, documentation, and verifiable data, Sebbar insists on the political significance of what is not said. The silence of her father, his refusal or inability to recount his past, to transmit his language, to share his memories, becomes central to the narrative. Yet Sebbar does not attempt to fill in the gaps. Rather, she foregrounds them as structural features of her history. She writes :"Je ne connais pas les dates, les faits, les récits. Je n'ai que des bribes, des silences, des gestes qu'il ne m'a pas expliqués" (Sebbar 2003, 34). This passage illustrates how Sebbar's mode of memory is not archival in the traditional sense. It is tactile, embodied, affective. The absence of facts is not a deficit, but a different kind of historical truth, one that resists the mastery of official historiography. This aligns with Ann Laura Stoler's call for "reading along the archival grain," a methodology that attends not only to what the archive reveals, but to how it conceals, organizes, and disciplines knowledge (Stoler 2009, 20). Sebbar, however, does not merely read the colonial archive critically; she writes in its wake, creating a parallel record that does not seek validation from institutional authority.

Her turn to the personal, then, is not an act of solipsism but of political resistance. As bell hooks has argued, the personal narrative becomes a form of "radical revisioning" when it is used to critique dominant ideologies and illuminate structures of oppression (hooks 1990, 146). Sebbar's reflections on her father's silence, her own linguistic disinheritance, and her identity as a French-Algerian woman operate within this framework. By writing herself into history, not as a representative subject, but as a singular, complex figure, she disrupts the homogenizing narratives of both colonial history and nationalist mythology.

Sebbar's personal archive is also marked by what Saidiya Hartman has described as the "afterlife of slavery", a concept that can be extended to colonialism as well, where the effects of historical violence persist in the present, shaping subjectivities, relationships, and memory practices (Hartman 2008, 6). Hartman's notion of "critical fabulation", the blending of historical fact, archival silence, and creative speculation, offers a useful framework for

understanding Sebbar's literary strategy. In choosing not to reconstruct a coherent paternal narrative, Sebbar fabulates within the gaps, allowing her fragments to gesture toward what cannot be fully known. Her prose is often poetic, impressionistic, suggestive:"Il ne disait rien de son père, de sa langue, de la guerre. Tout cela, je le devine dans son regard, dans les mots qu'il n'a jamais dits" (Sebbar 2003, 38). Here, history becomes a matter of reading expressions, deciphering silence, interpreting absence. It is a mode of historical reckoning that refuses verification, and in that refusal, it challenges the epistemological foundations of the colonial archive itself. Moreover, Sebbar's emphasis on affective and embodied memory, on how history is lived through gestures, silences, and intergenerational atmospheres, resonates with Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory." Hirsch defines postmemory as "the relationship that the generation after bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before," a memory shaped not by direct experience but by "imaginative investment, projection, and creation" (Hirsch 2012, 5). Sebbar's narrative is postmemorial in this precise sense: she does not inherit her father's language, but she inherits his silence, his displacement, his unspoken pain. She makes that inheritance visible—not through documentation, but through literary form.

In this way, *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père* contributes to what Jacques Derrida terms an "archive fever"—a compulsion to record, remember, and preserve in the face of loss (Derrida 1996, 91). Yet Sebbar's response to this fever is not archival accumulation but poetic subtraction. Her writing does not seek to stabilize memory, but to linger in its instability. This is a decolonial gesture, for it rejects the imperial logic of the archive, the desire to know, classify, and master the past, and instead honors the opacity, fluidity, and multiplicity of lived histories. The personal becomes political not only in what Sebbar remembers, but in how she remembers: through fragments, ellipses, and spectral evocations. This formal experimentation, as argued earlier, mirrors the disruptions of postcolonial memory and offers a new aesthetic of historical engagement. It is not through grand narratives or heroic testimonies that Sebbar claims her space in history, but through small, intimate observations, moments of confusion, longing, or emotional resonance—that reveal the deep entanglement of personal identity and geopolitical violence.

In reclaiming her own story, and the story of her father's silence, Sebbar resists both erasure and simplification. Her counter-archive is one that privileges ambiguity, complexity, and vulnerability. It stands as a literary and political intervention into the ways history is told, remembered, and lived. In doing so, Sebbar offers not only a testimony of loss but a blueprint

for resistance, one that insists that even in the absence of language, the past speaks, if we learn to listen to its traces.

Sebbar's personal archive of silence, fractured inheritance, and linguistic estrangement is not only an intimate reckoning with her own familial past but also a reflection of Algeria's collective struggles with memory and recognition. The tensions she exposes—between official histories and suppressed voices, between dominant and marginalized languages—reverberate far beyond her own life story. In this sense, her narrative offers a lens through which to understand how unresolved colonial legacies continue to shape the political present. The same dynamics of erasure and resistance that Sebbar locates within the family reappear in Algeria's contemporary landscape, from the Hirak movement's calls for justice and transparency to Amazigh activists' demands for linguistic and cultural recognition.

6. From Colonial Wounds to Contemporary Struggles

The dynamics of silence and estrangement that Sebbar inscribes in her autobiographical narrative also reverberate in Algeria's contemporary struggles. Current debates over language, historical recognition, and cultural plurality make visible how the wounds Sebbar examines are not confined to the past but continue to structure the postcolonial present. Situating her personal archive within this broader political matrix allows us to see how her work anticipates and resonates with movements such as the Hirak protests and Amazigh activism.

The legacy of colonialism in Algeria is not confined to the past. As scholars such as Todd Shepard and Zahia Smail Salhi have noted, the postcolonial state has often inherited and perpetuated the structural logics of colonial governance, particularly with regard to language and identity. In the years following independence, the Arabization policy, designed to eradicate the dominance of French and reassert national identity, emerged as both a tool of cultural decolonization and a mechanism of internal exclusion. Tamazight (Berber) languages were sidelined, regional dialects were suppressed, and diasporic or hybrid identities—such as Sebbar's—were rendered illegible or suspect. As Muriam Haleh Davis argues, "postcolonial language policy in Algeria created new hierarchies and exclusions in the name of undoing colonial violence" (Davis 2017, 92).

Sebbar's text prefigures these debates, positioning herself as a subject estranged not only by colonialism, but also by a nationalism that refuses hybridity. Her inability to speak Arabic is not simply a legacy of colonization, it becomes a marker of exclusion from the

postcolonial imaginary. She writes:"Je suis étrangère à la langue de mon père, mais aussi à la langue de l'Algérie d'aujourd'hui. Il n'y a pas de place pour ceux qui ne peuvent pas parler au nom d'un seul peuple" (Sebbar 2003, 47). This insight finds powerful echoes in the Hirak movement, a mass protest that erupted in 2019 in response to authoritarianism, corruption, and the erasure of plural voices within the Algerian state. While initially focused on political reform, the Hirak quickly expanded into a cultural and linguistic movement as well, calling for the recognition of Tamazight, the democratization of historical narratives, and an end to the monopolization of identity by state institutions. Protestors chanted not only for freedom and justice, but also for *karama* (dignity), *hak* (truth), and *iknan* (memory).

Sebbar's literary method—writing the trace, privileging silence, refusing closure—mirrors this ethos. Her fragmented narrative resists the official scripts of identity, offering instead a subjective, affective, and plural account of what it means to inherit a postcolonial legacy fractured by competing memories. In particular, her refusal to romanticize the paternal figure or recuperate a unified linguistic identity resonates with younger generations of Algerians who are increasingly skeptical of both colonial nostalgia and nationalist mythology.

Moreover, the struggle for Amazigh recognition, long marginalized in official discourses, has gained renewed prominence in recent years. After decades of activism, Tamazight was finally recognized as an official language in Algeria's 2016 constitutional reform. Yet the process of linguistic justice remains incomplete, as many activists argue that official recognition does not necessarily translate into equal status or real cultural autonomy. Sebbar's refusal to essentialize any one language, Arabic, French, or Berber, offers a prescient critique of such tokenistic gestures. Her narrative insists on the irreducible complexity of identity, shaped as much by what is missing as by what is present.Furthermore, her diasporic voice speaks to the tensions experienced by many Franco-Algerians and other North African descendants in France today. The legacy of colonialism is inscribed not only in Algerian policies but also in French public discourse, where questions of integration, language, and "laïcité" continue to marginalize postcolonial subjects. In this dual context, Sebbar's work becomes a bridge, a text that refuses to belong wholly to either side, but instead articulates a transnational subjectivity marked by in-betweenness. As Sophie McCall observes in her work on Indigenous testimony, "the politics of memory must also be the politics of location: whose memories, told where, and for whom?" (McCall 2011, 27). Sebbar's testimony is precisely about this dislocation: she writes from France, about Algeria, in French, but with a sense of estrangement from all these positions.

Her writing also resonates with broader decolonial movements that insist on memory as a political act. As Françoise Vergès argues, decolonial memory work involves "not only the restitution of stolen artifacts or documents but the restoration of voices, the right to opacity, and the right to complexity" (Vergès 2021, 55). Sebbar embodies this principle. She does not write to clarify but to complicate; not to unify but to fragment; not to resolve trauma but to make it visible. Her silence, her broken French sentences about her father, her refusal to learn Arabic in the text—all of these are acts of testimony, written against the grain of state-sanctioned remembrance. What Sebbar offers, then, is not a nostalgic vision of return, but a radical poetics of refusal. Her work insists that the postcolonial subject cannot be assimilated into the tidy categories of nation-state, language policy, or identity politics. She resists the binary between victimhood and heroism, between colonized and liberated, between French and Algerian. Her text is inhabited by ghosts—of her father, of the Arabic language, of a lost Algeria—but these ghosts do not demand exorcism. They demand recognition.

CONCLUSION

Leïla Sebbar's *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père* is a singular yet profoundly resonant exploration of the afterlives of colonialism, an inquiry into what happens when language, memory, and identity are shaped not by inheritance, but by rupture. Through her intimate reflections on her father's silence and her own linguistic disconnection from Arabic, Sebbar illuminates the enduring effects of colonial linguistic violence, as well as the internal contradictions of postcolonial nationalisms that replicate structures of exclusion in the name of unity. Her text offers no easy reconciliations, no neat resolutions; instead, it insists on the legitimacy of fragmentation, the dignity of silence, and the politics of ambiguity.

Throughout the work, Sebbar challenges dominant models of history and belonging, those that prioritize coherence, purity, and completeness. In their place, she offers a poetics of discontinuity, rooted in feminist, decolonial, and postmemory frameworks. Drawing on theorists such as Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, Marianne Hirsch, and Jacques Derrida, this article has demonstrated how Sebbar's hybrid narrative form performs a kind of resistance to both colonial historiography and nationalist homogenization. Her refusal to recover or reconstruct a singular origin—be it linguistic, familial, or national—is not a failure, but a deliberate stance: a literary ethics that honors the complexity of postcolonial subjectivity.

Sebbar's method, what Emma Wilson calls "writing the trace", is particularly crucial. In writing around silence, rather than attempting to fill it, Sebbar renders visible the absences that structure postcolonial identity. Her father's language, Arabic, is never heard in the text, but its ghostly presence haunts every page. This hauntological structure, as Derrida would suggest, displaces the linear temporality of historical recovery and instead foregrounds the spectral force of what has been lost but not forgotten. Seen in this light, Sebbar's narrative becomes an alternative archive, one shaped not by institutional authority, but by affect, partial memory, and personal refusal.

Her feminist intervention lies not only in her attention to gendered silences, but also in her challenge to the patriarchal structures of both colonial modernity and post-independence nationalism. By foregrounding the perspectives of women, by privileging maternal relationships, and by occupying a liminal position as a Franco-Algerian woman writing in French, Sebbar opens space for new forms of belonging, forms that do not require the repression of multiplicity. She writes as the daughter of a father whose language she cannot speak and a mother whose homeland she does not inhabit, yet she refuses to see this condition as one of lack. Instead, she transforms it into a site of creation and critique.

Moreover, her work is not confined to the past. As this article has shown, *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père* speaks powerfully to the present, especially in the context of the Hirak movement, Amazigh activism, and the ongoing debates around linguistic justice and historical memory in Algeria. In resisting both colonial erasure and nationalist reduction, Sebbar anticipates a new ethics of memory, one that is attentive to plurality, rooted in personal testimony, and alive to the contradictions of postcolonial inheritance.

Her refusal to learn Arabic in the narrative, her reluctance to impose meaning on her father's silence, and her aesthetic embrace of fragmentation are all acts of resistance. They reject the idea that decolonization can be achieved simply by reversing colonial narratives or reclaiming precolonial identities. Instead, Sebbar proposes a deeper, more difficult project: the creation of new forms of memory and subjectivity that remain open to uncertainty, complexity, and contradiction.

In this way, *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père* is not only a testimony of loss, but also a blueprint for how to live, and write in the wake of colonial rupture. It is a text of resistance not through polemic, but through subtlety; not through the language of mastery, but through the

embrace of what Hélène Cixous called "the infinite within us" (Cixous 1993, 96). Sebbar teaches us that history can be written without certainty, that identity can be affirmed through ambivalence, and that silence can speak, not as absence, but as presence.

Her work remains profoundly relevant for contemporary readers, especially for those grappling with questions of diaspora, language politics, gendered inheritance, and cultural hybridity. In refusing to speak the language of her father, Sebbar speaks in a different voice: one that listens, questions, hesitates, and resists. It is in this voice, at once intimate and insurgent, that we hear the echoes of a larger struggle, for memory, for justice, and for a more inclusive understanding of what it means to belong.

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CHAPTER 2

Unveiling Colonial Legacies: Gender, Identity, and Cultural Displacement in Abdelhamid Benhedouga's *La mise à nu*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines Abdelhamid Benhedouga's novel *La mise à nu* through a postcolonial perspective, focusing on the complex interplay of colonial history, national culture, and personal identity within the framework of cultural hybridity in post-independence Algeria. The study investigates how the novel expresses the lingering shadows of decolonization, notably the lasting effects of patriarchal and colonial systems embedded in Algerian culture. Through a close examination of generational and gendered tensions embodied by characters such as Dalila and Naima, the research highlights their struggles for agency and self-definition amid societal expectations and the layered Otherness imposed by patriarchy and residual colonial ideology. Dalila's quest for independence and Naima's experience of marginalization within her own community underscore the fractured identities and subaltern positions occupied by women in postcolonial Algeria. The novel is thus positioned as a vital literary space where the complexities of hybrid identities and the silenced voices of the oppressed are revealed and challenged. By emphasizing Naima's symbolic marginalization, this multidisciplinary study exposes the shortcomings of the post-independence state and critiques nationalist discourses

that overlook internal hierarchies and gendered exclusions. Ultimately, La mise à nu emerges as a significant addition to postcolonial literature, offering critical insight into ongoing conflicts surrounding identity, voice, and cultural belonging in Algeria's evolving social context.

Keywords: La mise à nu – Postcolonial Identity Fracture – Cultural Displacement – Subalternity – Marginalization

INTRODUCTION

The Algerian war of liberation was a protracted and extremely fierce struggle against French colonial rule. It began with the 1830 invasion and led to Algeria being incorporated as part of France itself, rather than remaining a colony. This profound integration meant that the path to independence was ruthless, marked by the systematic elimination of Algerian identity, the suppression of Arabic and Berber languages, and the dismantling of civil liberties. Repeated broken promises after World War II, together with massacres such as those of Sétif and Guelma in 1945, intensified nationalist fervor and convinced many Algerians that peaceful negotiation was impossible. From this history emerges the central problem that frames this study: the colonial destruction of identity and the incomplete liberation achieved through independence. This chapter argues that Abdelhamid Benhadouga's *La Mise à Nu* exposes the gendered limits of Algeria's decolonization project by revealing the persistent patriarchal structures and colonial legacies that shaped post-independence social realities.

The conviction that armed struggle was the only solution ignited the Algerian War of Independence in November 1954, organized by the FLN. Their insurgent strategies were met with devastating French military power, widespread carnage, and massive civilian displacement. The brutality of the conflict drew international denunciation and created deep political instability within France itself. After eight years of relentless violence, the Evian Accords of March 1962 opened the way for a referendum on self-determination. Algeria declared independence on July 5, 1962, yet immediately faced daunting challenges: the sudden departure of over a million European settlers, the vacuum left by colonial administrators, and the immense task of reconstructing a society deeply scarred by both colonial domination and a brutal war of liberation. This paradoxical moment of freedom gained yet fragility exposed constitutes the backdrop against which writers and intellectuals sought to interpret, critique, and narrate the meaning of independence.

Writers and novelists sought to capture these realities, portraying colonialism, independence, and the difficulties of nation-building. Among them, Abdelhamid Benhadouga's *La Mise à Nu* stands out as a powerful literary exploration of Algeria's postcolonial wounds. It reveals how colonial domination produced lasting tensions, fragmented identities, and pervasive cultural displacement. Unlike other Maghrebi writers such as Assia Djebar, whose works foreground women's memories and historical testimonies as a recovery of silenced voices, or Kateb Yacine, who used fragmented language and symbolism to depict exile and cultural alienation, Benhadouga situates his narrative squarely in the contradictions of everyday post-independence life, showing how grand political ideals collapse when confronted with entrenched patriarchy and corruption. His novel complements but also complicates the broader Maghrebi literary canon by highlighting the intimate scale of women's daily struggles.

La Mise à Nu is both unsettling and influential, probing the social and psychological consequences of post-independence Algeria. It focuses primarily on the lives of women while questioning traditional gender roles. At its center is Dalila, a young woman burdened by societal pressures and traditional restrictions. After the euphoria of independence fades, she finds herself trapped in a web of problems. The novel reveals the pretenses and contradictions that characterized the new Algerian state, a society that simultaneously proclaimed revolutionary ideals while reinforcing deep-rooted patriarchal customs, tolerating corruption, and perpetuating wounds inherited from colonialism. By foregrounding women's experiences, the text makes visible the paradox that those who participated in the revolution were later marginalized in the new nation.

The novel also functions as a blunt literary indictment of post-independence disillusionment. It challenges the naïve image of a united and harmonious nation by demonstrating that liberty was not shared equally. Women, despite their active participation in the revolution, were often relegated back to traditional roles. Benhadouga highlights fractures within Algerian society between tradition and modernity, revolutionary ideals and corrupt bureaucratic practices, and individual aspirations and collective constraints. This study therefore explores three interconnected themes: the enduring legacies of colonial domination, the gendered subjugation of women through patriarchal norms, and the fractured postcolonial identities embodied by Dalila, Naima, and other characters. Through this thematic framing, the novel emerges as a crucial lens for understanding how independence remained incomplete for large sections of society.

The novel is structured into thirteen chapters and follows the intertwined lives of Dalila and her cousin Naima, who moves from the countryside to Algiers for her studies. Through alternating perspectives and detailed character portraits, Benhadouga addresses alienation, identity negotiation, and generational conflict in a rapidly changing society. Dalila's rejection of cultural conventions through smoking, drinking, and relationships outside marriage underscores both her agency and her vulnerability. Meanwhile, Naima's journey reveals how education, urban mobility, and social surveillance interact in the post-independence city. Their experiences collectively mirror the tensions of a society caught between tradition and transformation, between rural and urban spaces, and between revolutionary promises and social realities.

The narrative intensifies as Dalila conceals her pregnancy and Naima suffers trauma after false accusations from her father. Social spaces such as the hammam, family gatherings, and reformist unions reveal how inequalities especially those impacting women are both reinforced and resisted. The story closes with unresolved conflicts, emphasizing the vulnerability of women and the dominance of honor-based traditions. Through its depiction of private lives and daily struggles, *La Mise à Nu* critiques Algerian postcolonial society, showing how new and old structures of oppression overlapped and persisted.

This research examines how Benhadouga's novel highlights the legacies of colonialism and patriarchy that continued to shape Algeria after independence. It shows the difficulties of self-definition faced by women marginalized by both societal norms and internalized colonial logics. Dalila's sense of being "the other," caught between incompatible worlds, and Naima's marginalization within her community, both illustrate the fractured identities of women in postcolonial Algeria. Using close textual reading and discourse analysis within the frameworks of Edward Said's Orientalism, Gayatri Spivak's subaltern theory, Frantz Fanon's critique of colonial violence, and feminist/postcolonial criticism, this study dissects the novel's narrative strategies and character dynamics. These tools allow us to uncover how the text illuminates broader socio-political power relations, exposing the fragility of family structures, the vulnerability of women, and the silenced voices of the subaltern. In this way, *La Mise à Nu* provides a crucial literary space that reveals, contests, and critiques the complexities of hybrid identity and the contradictions of nation-building in early independent Algeria.

Postcolonial studies is fundamentally multidisciplinary, drawing on history, geography, political science, anthropology, and modern languages. This approach enables a comprehensive

investigation of colonial legacies across different fields, challenging conventional academic boundaries (Anithalakshmi 615). In this research, a qualitative method is employed, with Abdelhamid Benhedouga's *La mise à nu* serving as the primary source of analysis. Quotes and passages from the novel are carefully selected and examined to form the textual basis of the study, allowing for a nuanced exploration of how postcolonial and subaltern issues are represented.

The analytical framework combines close reading, thematic interpretation, and discourse analysis, which together provide a critical apparatus for interrogating the intersections of colonial residues and gendered oppression in the novel. Close reading allows for detailed, line-by-line engagement with significant passages, uncovering subtle textual strategies, symbolic meanings, and complex postcolonial tensions. This method reveals not only stylistic and narrative choices but also the implicit reproduction of patriarchal and colonial power structures that linger within the post-independence Algerian context. Discourse analysis complements this by situating the novel's narrative voice and dialogues within wider socio-political realities, thereby exposing how textual elements reflect and contest systems of power, authority, and cultural identity. The combination of these tools ensures that literary analysis is embedded in both textual precision and historical-social critique.

At a theoretical level, this study synthesizes the insights of Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Frantz Fanon to construct a coherent interpretive lens. Said's notion of orientalism highlights how colonial discourse continues to shape cultural representation; Spivak's concept of the subaltern informs the reading of marginalized female voices and their silencing; and Fanon's psychoanalytic critique of colonialism provides a framework for understanding fractured identities, alienation, and the lasting trauma of colonial violence. Together, these theoretical perspectives guide the analysis of how *La mise à nu* dramatizes the entanglement of colonial legacies, patriarchy, and identity negotiation.

The methodological process involves selecting and interpreting textual excerpts that exemplify the novel's engagement with postcolonial and subaltern concerns, then linking them to these broader theoretical frameworks. Each passage is read not only in its narrative context but also in relation to Algerian society and history in the aftermath of independence. The interpretive commentary thus moves between the micro-level of textual analysis and the macro-level of socio-political critique, demonstrating how literature both mirrors and interrogates cultural realities.

1. The Scars of Colonial Legacy: Generational Gaps and Differing Ideologies

In his article, **"The Algerian Perspectives: Ideology,"**, Algerian writer and philosopher Malek Bennabi provided a thorough description of the status quo of Algeria at the dawn of its independence**: "**Algeria is a young country that has to find the propeller of its politics according to its own historical conditions. It must find, by its own effort, the ways and means that suit it conditionally best, keeping in mind that what is possible in a country at the dawn of civilization, that is to say, when it is starting from zero" (BENNABI et ASMA 425) the previous quote frames the building stages of political and national identity that needs active shaping, instead of depending on inherited structures or ideologies.

This active shaping of the national identity and ideologies depends on self-determination and autonomy while rejecting any idea of merely importing political models or ideologies from other countries. As an alternative, Algeria's political route should be progressively drawn from its own past, fights, and cultural realities. The comparison to "a nation starting from zero" is hyperbolic due to Algeria's post-independence situation because no country actually starts from "zero" because of its present population, culture, land, and history. This statement highlights the challenges and opportunities of constructing a new nation from foundational ideologies. This standpoint might instigate a sense of revolutionary spirit and the autonomy to start over without any constrains set by conventional models.

In his novel, Benhadouga used Sheikh Allaoua to portray generational conflict; in page 25, he said to the young man standing by him waiting for the bus, "Don't you know who I am, boy?" [The other person replied]: "Don't call me 'boy'. And then, I wouldn't care who you are if I didn't know you. But now I do know you: you are the past we don't want. That's who you are." (Benhaddouga 25) The use of the term "boy" by Sheikh Allaoua is loaded with a sense of disdain, a supposition of authority based on age and experience. It asserts a hierarchy where the elder is inherently superior and deserving of unquestioning deference. The younger person's refusal to be called 'boy' is a denunciation of this hierarchical dynamic. This direct contest to the senior's authority indicates a generational shift where traditional systems of reverence are no more recognized. However, the central conflict is in fact one of opposing ideologies. On one hand, Sheikh Allaoua embodies the "past", a set of conventional norms, traditions, and a

political or societal order that he represents and expects to be respected. His identity, and thus his ideology, is rooted in what has been.

The young man's statement, "You are the past we don't want. That's who you are," on the other hand, is a complete refusal of this past. This statement is not simply insolent; it is a deep ideological conflict. It implies a denunciation of the morals and failures that the young generation related to the older one's epoch. It advocates a longing for an essential revolution and a yearning for, in Bennabi's words, constructing a new nation from foundational ideologies. Fundamentally, this conversation demonstrates a central struggle: the elder generation's longing to preserve significance and control, starting with their historical situation and conventional ideologies, as opposed to the younger generation's ambition to embark on a new journey of change, devoid of the restrictions and setbacks of the past. It is a miniature of social progress, where reputable orders are contested and new ideas for the future arise.

Additionally, the writer portrayed an Algerian nation in the making in which ideologies are contested to put the country on the right track. As a result of the lengthy and ruthless war for liberation, Algeria was left with a compound power void and a yearning to carve a new national identity. Notwithstanding, post-independence Algeria was marked by a conflict between conventional forces and traditional ideals and a modern perspective seeking a different path than the latter. For them, people like Sheikh Allaoua were considered "You are brakes against all progress." We are brakes? They described us with conservatism, reactionism, and all the other descriptions… They told us that Islam is outdated and doesn't solve the problems of the times. Here's the charter instead of Islam." (Benhaddouga 22)

Sheikh Allaoua's failure to perceive what's in fact ahead of him: "dozens of ships waiting, nor the blue and clear water." Denotes his blindness to advancement, new times and prospects, and a contemporary world that has moved outside his outdated background. The ships in the above quote represent a different Algeria which is embarking on an active economy open to global trade, new means of transport, and a world interrelated and swiftly shifting at a fast pace. The Algerian youth willingly embraced these prospects and considered them paths to progress. The "Life He Dreamed Of" indicates that Sheikh Allaoua is socially motionless, embracing a way of life that is no longer dominant or existent. He is psychologically fixed in a long-gone time; his ideology is deeply rooted in nostalgia and conservatism, prioritizing steadiness over transformation. He started questioning his very existence and his own love for Algeria and his fight for independence:

After what he saw and heard in the meeting and elsewhere, what does he do with that love? And what is the value of his whole life lost on this city and for this city? Is it Algeria that has changed, or time, or him? No, Sheikh Allaoua does not change... All the changes he lived through didn't affect him; they didn't even reach the level of a passing alarm in his soul… What has changed, then, is time. It was running, and Sheikh Allaoua stood watching it, and he found himself, when everyone gathered, a stranger." (my emphasis) (Benhaddouga 27)

His philosophy thwarts him from identifying the existence of the current landscape, a topography that seemed challenging to navigate. The central line, "He would have realized that the life he dreamed of was left far behind," captures the clash of ideologies. It does not only imply that his vision of the world he is living in is gone; it is *far behind,* suggesting an immense sociopolitical abyss between his generation's perception of the world and the existing one. His awareness is a blunt and excruciating realization of an Algeria going through a social and economic metamorphosis.

Sheikh Allaoua's upheaval is also witnessed in his own family. His sons and daughters constantly discuss the fact that he is out of place and out of class. His son Ridha stated clearly that "It pains me that my father did not want to know his class!" (Benhaddouga 67) his father is going through a conscious or subconscious *rejection* to perceive his social class, instead of being oblivious. Such an act is a form of rejection, evasion, or even an intended turning away from a possibly painful reality. Dalila also provided a detailed description of who her father is. "He is a man who wasted his time and remained timeless! Whenever he saw someone and admired them, he tried to imitate them or get closer to them!" (Benhaddouga 110) This quote provides a prominent depiction of the generational gap in Sheikh Allaoua's values and perceptions. On the other hand, the declaration that he "remained timeless!" proposes a diverse set of principles, cherished by older or more contemplative generations.

This assessment surpasses the direct burdens of conservative success, concentrating on permanent abilities, deep human connections, and constant learning that are not bound by definite times or passing trends. The quote "Whenever he saw someone and admired them, he tried to imitate them or get closer to them!" sharpens the generational disparity more. For younger generations, mainly those absorbed in a culture that is overwhelmed by authenticity and essential individualism, persistent mimicry can be considered a weak, dependent *self*. It

also proposes a failure to create an individual identity and indicates shallowness in a quest for external authentication.

2- Fragmented Selves: Identity Fractures in the Wake of Colonialism

> *"The other is not merely a reflection of the self, but a unique and independent being."* (Levinas 42)

By drawing the reader into Dalila's internal monologue, the author begins the book by elevating a challenging voice. This storytelling method gives readers personal access to Dalila's mental and emotional environment, putting her psychological state and sarcastic behavior at the heart of the story. The novel begins with a prolonged soliloquy that portrays Dalila as a rebellious figure especially important in the context of Algerian culture. Dalila's internal monologue lists a number of cultural restrictions, all of which she actively violates: she smokes, drinks, engages in sexual activity, and is pregnant outside of marriage. By expressing these acts of disobedience, the tale not only questions dominant social standards but also questions hers, highlighting both sides: the agency and resistance and cultural expectations.

The opening chapter not only introduces Dalila's subaltern perspective, but it also defines the outlines of her family, defining the larger social context in which the tale unfolds. The mother, Oum Kalthoum, whose presence is contrasted with that of her father, Cheikh Allaoua, a character shown later as particularly troublesome, whose actions serve as triggers for a number of crucial events in the family. The three brothers are Omar, who is a bank director; Mourad, who finished studying medicine in France and is a doctor in the public hospital of Algiers; and Ridha, still a university student. The sisters, Zoubida, the eldest, is a university graduate, while Hala, the youngest, is still pursuing her education. Mouna, Omar's wife, and their children, and Naima, a cousin from the countryside who has moved in with her uncle's family to complete her university degree.

Dalila, the novel's protagonist, is also living in a cultural and psychological dilemma, trying constantly to reconcile the different identities she adopted along the way and the variety of facades she opted for. She lived like an *Other*, being a female in a male-dominant society, within an *Other* by breaking all social rules and constrains just to exhibit her rebellious character. The opening scene in the novel is quite telling in terms of her psychological turmoil: "She finished her morning exercises, approached the closet mirror, and said, looking at her face and body, 'I'm beautiful, aren't I?' Don't you dare reflect a *false image of me*!" (Benhaddouga 5) The most prominent aspect is how she treats the mirror as a separate being, an *Other* with

agency. She addresses it, orders it, and asks for a definite reply, "Don't you dare reflect a false image of me!" Her personification provides the inanimate object with the capacity for decision-making and the likelihood of trickery.

Dalila's anxiety about the "false image" and her direction of not "reflecting a false image of me!" illuminates a subconscious apprehension about the mirror's probable act of distortion. This "false image" denotes an unwanted *Otherness*; an image of herself that she does not identify with or admit to, a version that exposes a lack of confidence she needs to conceal. Her anxiety is that the mirror, as the Other, may deceive her inner reality. This citation discloses a dilemma amid the woman's inner self-awareness, "I'm beautiful", and her need for affirming that awareness on the outside. This process generates a superior image of Otherness inside herself; it is, in fact, the detachment between who she assumes she is and by what means she is worried she might be reflected, thus perceived. Therefore, Dalila is in quest of merging these two *selves*. Her confident declaration, "I'm beautiful," advocates an ideal opinion of yourself. Her following order to the mirror exposes an anxiety that the replicated *self* might prove inadequate of this perfection, consequently producing an undesirable *other* version of *herself* that she cannot control.

Gayatri Spivak's concept of the subaltern figure, which refers to individuals who are marginalized and silenced within dominant society discourses, is powerfully illustrated in the novel through the examination of the shattered identities of Dalila and Naima. The struggle that Dalila goes through to affirm her agency in the face of patriarchal and colonial legacies is reminiscent of Spivak's theory, which states that hegemonic power structures frequently filter or render incomprehensible the voices of subaltern groups. In a similar manner, Frantz Fanon's postcolonial psychology assists in the unpacking of the internal conflict and alienation that these people face as they navigate the tension between imposed colonial identities and the pursuit of real selfhood. Our comprehension of the novel's depiction of gendered disenfranchisement in Algeria after the country's independence is enhanced by the junction of textual representation and critical theory.

To provide us with a naïve external viewpoint on the situation of women in post-independence Algeria, the writer included the character of Naims, the rural young girl who is experiencing the world and learning about it from all other characters in the story. She constantly admits her surprise at the immense difference of the gender roles she is accustomed to and the ones she is learning about in her new social milieu. "In a popular setting, among

different social groups. I was able to see on television some women, especially young girls, openly speaking in front of men with very daring statements. And I, as a woman, am not used to hearing such things! I also saw and heard a lot of harsh criticism of government officials." **(**Benhaddouga 121**)**

In Chapter Three, the author highlights Naima's experience as an "other", a rural young woman who, despite her education, keenly perceives her outsider status among relatives still contending with the residual impacts of colonialism and persistent social transformation (Ruedy, 2005). This feeling of alienation is vividly depicted during a visit to the public bath (hammam) with her uncle's wife and her cousin Zoubida. The hammam, an important cultural and gendered venue in Algerian culture, serves as a location where social hierarchies and fears are both reinforced and contested.

Dalila, on the other hand, is starting to question and even rebel against any preconceived gender role she is used to and wanted to radically change her life, although not the best of interests, "what she lives in is all hypocrisy, all falsehood, all delusion! All a mirage! ... Everything she had been told or heard about religion, morals, family, and people began to take on other forms in her mind that she hadn't imagined before." (Benhaddouga 103) The quote dives into a character's stark awareness that her life is built on a foundation of "hypocrisy, all falsehood, all delusion! All a mirage!" This powerful anaphora (repetition of "all...") highlights the devastating and full picture of her disillusionment. Everything in her life suggests a complete failure to trust in her milieu. The use of "mirage" suggests that what she supposed was rock-hard and real was, in fact, a deception, this preliminary stage designates the outcome of her inner calamity, which ends up to an ample denunciation of her alleged reality. Dalila's internal monologue during this meeting sheds light on her psychological condition and her negotiation of gendered boundaries and roles in public areas.

This sequence highlights Dalila's complicated connection with males while also emphasizing her autonomy and fragility as she negotiates social standards and personal aspirations. The interaction of her thoughts and actions in this situation provides a complex examination of her place within a patriarchal culture, emphasizing both the hazards she confronts and the autonomy she expresses. Just like Che Guevara, whose name appears multiple times in the novel and who played a crucial role in the two-year guerrilla campaign that led to the overthrow of the Batista regime in Cuba in 1959, Dalila played the role of revolutionary figure standing in front of all the religious and cultural standards adopted by the Algerian

society. She, by all means, opposed all of these codes announcing a war to overthrow whatever social standards and religious status her father Sheikh Allaoua represents, calling him 'the General' who, from her standpoint, exhibits power and dictatorship with all his family members; therefore, he needs to be overthrown from his throne. "What you're saying requires a complete revolution in life, behavior, and perception. It requires a huge explosion." (Benhaddougha 17)

2.1 Language and Identity: The Lingering Presence of French

In her influential essay *Can the Sub*altern Speak, Gayatri Spivak underscored the intricate question about the representation and voice of marginalized groups exposing the complexities and ethical dilemmas involved in this representation, particularly in postcolonial contexts. Like all post-colonial novels, Ben Hadouga's *La Mise à Nu* is no exception because it is not devoid of questions about representation and, in particular, the long-term effect of the colonizer's language both on identity and culture. In this context, Gayatry claims that the subaltern; those entirely subordinated by colonialism and detached from all lines of social mobility, are not able to speak in a way that is understandably perceived, approved, and recognized within dominant discursive structures. The subaltern's voice is either filtered, appropriated, or rendered incomprehensible by the very systems that seek to represent them. (Spivak 280) In post-independence Algeria, the debate about which language to adopt both in institutions and everyday life was heated.

Benhaddouga provided a meticulous depiction of this argument by making the reader live the conversations and even allowing us to weigh each view between those who believe that "a language cannot advance while its nation is lagging behind. The advancement and development of a language are dependent on the advancement and development of the Arab nation itself… our use or non-use of the Arabic language will not free us from this alienation and subjugation in which we live. We live in an environment foreign to our language and our perception of the universe and humanity." (Benhaddougha 136) and those who were proud of speaking the French language as an exhibition of intellect and higher status "It is fortunate that its sons, who fought for its liberation and are fighting today for its construction, speak French in Algeria, alongside their educated brothers in Arabic. It *is a unique historical opportunity*, and if we make good use of it and our civilization in a known historical context, we will not only restore Arabic to its rightful place, but we will also reach a level of modern civilization that it has not reached for centuries" (Benhaddougha 138). Post-independence, Algerians were

enduring a constant reconstruction of their identity, both nationally and personally, to the extent that they were living like an *Other* within an already *otherness* caused by the colonial power that even the language itself is becoming a hurdle towards a successful integration of all Algerians under one cultural umbrella where they live in a homogeneous society.

For some who were totally absorbed in the French culture, such interaction between the two languages guarantees progress, and at the same time ensures harmony among the various human energies available, and provides all the necessary conditions for the Algerian nation to advance to the level of creativity in science and technology. This view was strongly opposed by many theorists and Algerians themselves, who considered this view as an indirect subjugation to the colonizer. In his seminal work *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature,* Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's argued strongly for the rejection of European languages in African literature and education, proclaiming that the language of the colonizer is a principal instrument of psychological and cultural subjugation. "The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation." (Thiong'o 56) This quote highlights the deceptive nature of verbal colonization. Indeed, whereas physical violence attains instant control over the colonized, language on the other side is considered a "cultural bomb" that terminates a people's sense of *self* and their association with their traditions and values, in addition to their ability for autonomous thought and creativity. Therefore, spiritual subjugation is far more permanent and destructive than the corporal one.

In the novel, characters are constantly highlighting this enduring destructive effect of the very language spoken by the people. "I only wonder: isn't continuing education in French a kind of maintaining foreign dominance and consolidating the cultural identity of the occupier, in a way that even the extremists of colonialism did not realize?" (Benhaddougha 142) Accordingly, by writing in the colonizer's tongue, we are still indirectly under control of a colonial power which is still exhibiting its cultural institution through the very language it speaks. In spite of the innocent role a language can exhibit as a means of communication, "Language, any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture." (Thiong'o 82) Therefore, language is not simply an unbiased vehicle for transmitting information; it is profoundly entangled with a people's worldview, history, values and collective memory. By imposing a foreign language, the colonizer is intentionally imposing his own culture.

Nationalist characters in the novel realized this concealed colonizing system where language is the chief constituent of cultural identity, which can be a growing state for foreign cultures among Algerians. It establishes a maintenance and determination to strike and eradicate Arab culture way more effectively than colonial eradication:

> Because that relied on oppression, prohibition, and the obliteration of Algeria's historical, political, and cultural landmarks. As for our use of French, if it is not for the purpose of reviving and establishing these landmarks in the minds of our children, then it will result in one of the following situations: Either absolute cultural dependency with its consequent alienation and complexities or a schism in identity and hostility towards the most important elements of national and cultural identity, which is language. (Benhaddougha 143)

All in all, we come to realize that characters are already aware of this identity rupture that the colonizer already established through ferocity but are more concerned about being indirectly under French control despite the long bloody years of war for liberation. Aligning with Ngugi's view, we recognize the hidden powerful destructive capacity of language, which deviates from just being a means of communication to being a remnant of the colonizer acting as a psychological tool. "To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others. For colonialism, this involved two aspects of the same process: the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people's culture... and the conscious elevation of the language of the colonizer." (Thiong'o 91)

Postcolonial literature is frequently used to express explicit or nuanced opposition to colonial oppression. This resistance can be, with authors describing the reassertion of cultural identities and addressing problems such as gender and intersectionality. Bhabha's idea of mimicry demonstrates how colonized individuals adopt exaggerated imitation as a means of subversive resistance, undermining colonial authority (Anithalakshmi 616). The postcolonial novel, which reflects the continuous struggle to define selfhood and power following the exit of colonial power, frequently functions in Algerian literature as a testimony to collective trauma as well as a tool for reconstructing national memory (Dobie 112).

The postcolonial Algerian novel serves as a multifaceted literary realm where the ideas of Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Frantz Fanon converge to reveal the persistent legacy of colonialism. Each theory provides a unique yet complementary perspective

for comprehending the complex challenges encountered by individuals and civilizations following imperial domination.

Edward Said's critical framework, particularly his concept of Orientalism, offers a valuable perspective for the analysis of these narratives. Said contends that colonial discourse portrayed the "Orient" as inherently inferior, thereby supporting domination and influencing the postcolonial state long after formal independence. Said notes in works like Culture and Imperialism that the cessation of colonial rule rarely results in immediate stability; rather, societies such as Algeria frequently experience political confusion, power imbalance, and fragile social infrastructures. New power frequently replicates authoritarian structures that are reminiscent of colonial governance, resulting in a nation that is adrift and lacks a clear ruling authority and a fractured sense of identity (Said 278-79). The dissolution of traditional social bonds and the challenges of forging a cohesive national identity are vividly depicted in Algerian postcolonial novels, which capture this ambiance of uncertainty. And in the novel, we can trace the Orientalist concept in social interactions; for instance, the use of the name Fatma for the inferior class (the worker in the bath and Krimo's maid). That showcases the colonizer-made hierarchy, which persisted till after independence, ironically used by natives to disgrace their own people.

The complex dynamics of marginalization and self-discovery in postcolonial Algeria are revealed through the application of Spivak's theory to the characters of Dalila and Naima. The enduring challenges that subaltern women encounter are emphasized by their journeys in Algiers, which necessitate them to navigate not only the legacies of colonialism in their entourage mentality but also the persistent constraints of local patriarchies. The story challenges and exposes the mechanisms of suppression through its narratives, encouraging readers to contemplate the potential and constraints of subaltern agency.

Spivak's critique of both colonial and patriarchal power systems is fundamentally rooted in the concept of being "othered within the other." Dalila and Naima, as Algerian women, are situated as subalterns on two fronts: the patriarchal norms of their own society The fathers' mentality and attitudes in accordance with local culture, which continue to limit female agency, and the hegemonic colonial order, which has historically suppressed indigenous voices in this case, the voice of the Algerian woman as she was during colonialism, voiceless and nameless (all being called Fatima). According to Spivak, the subaltern woman's voice is frequently appropriated or obliterated by colonial discourse and nationalist initiatives that neglect to

address gendered forms of oppression (Spivak 106-07). The narrative vividly illustrates the profound challenge of articulating a cogent sense of self when one is persistently spoken for rather than permitted to speak, as Dalila and Naima's attempts at self-discovery are repeatedly undermined by these intersecting forces (men in their lives).

Frantz Fanon's theory provides a critical viewpoint for comprehending the cultural and psychological confusion that permeates the postcolonial Algerian novel. Fanon's work, notably in Black Skin, White Masks and The Wretched of the Earth, demonstrates how colonialism induces a profound sense of alienation in the colonized subject, who is entangled between the imposed culture of the colonizer and their own indigenous heritage. The novel's portrayal of all characters, both men and women (especially the younger generation), as they navigate the tensions of dual cultural identities is indicative of this perplexity. They embody what Fanon refers to as a "zone of occult instability," as they are neither entirely at ease in the world left behind by colonialism nor entirely assured in the emergent postcolonial order (Fanon, Wretched 183).

A fundamental element of this uncertainty is the social discord that emerges among individuals within the postcolonial society. Fanon contends that colonialism engenders a profound sense of inferiority in the colonized, especially about their language and cultural traditions. This is clearly depicted in the narrative through individuals who perceive Arabic as a subordinate language and who exhibit a lack of trust in their own government systems. Fanon posits that "the colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards," resulting in the internalization of the colonizer's ideals and the denigration of indigenous identity (Fanon, Black Skin 18). The characters' conflicts with language and self-esteem illustrate this psychological inheritance, as they fluctuate between accepting and repudiating their own background.

Furthermore, the story illustrates how this inferiority complex influences perspectives on government and collective self-determination. The absence of confidence in Arabic and indigenous authority reflects a larger identity dilemma, which Fanon recognizes as a continual impediment to authentic decolonization. He asserts that genuine liberation necessitates not only the cessation of colonial domination but also a profound revolution in consciousness, wherein the once colonized restore pride in their language, culture, and ability for self-governance (Fanon, Wretched 239). The individuals' ambivalence and societal conflicts exemplify the

wider postcolonial endeavor to transcend the psychological repercussions of the rule of colonialism.

The viewpoints of Said, Spivak, and Fanon collectively emphasize the postcolonial novel as a locus of resistance, healing, and critical introspection. The novel's examples chronicle the persistent struggles for identity, voice, and autonomy while urging readers to engage with the lasting intricacies of decolonization. This reinforces literature's capacity to document suffering, challenge suppression, and envision fresh prospects for postcolonial futures.

CONCLUSION

Abdelhamid Ben Hadouga's *La mise à nu* serves as a profound literary criticism of post-independence Algeria, exposing the lingering effects of colonialism and the continued dominance of patriarchy within the nation's social structure. The narrative illustrates, via the intertwining lives of Dalila and Naima, how the ambitions for independence were inconsistently achieved, particularly for women constrained by both colonial legacies and revived societal norms. *La mise à nu* considerably contributes to postcolonial literature by elucidating the persistent challenges for power, recognition, and belonging within Algeria's transforming social environment. Ben Hadouga's work encourages readers to acknowledge decolonization as an ongoing process, marked by negotiation, opposition, and the necessity to reveal the enduring contradictions and scars of the present. In this regard, *La mise à nu* continues to serve as an essential literary platform for expressing mixed identities and elevating voices that have historically been marginalized.

Algerian postcolonial literature, by portraying continuous confrontations for identity, voice, and self-determination, not only pays testimony to past scars but also affirms the importance of continued resistance and critical introspection. In doing so, it demonstrates literature's ongoing ability to promote restoration, create interaction, and envision more equal futures for postcolonial communities. These works, based on the analytical frameworks of Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Frantz Fanon, show how colonial legacies continue to shape identity, power, and social connections even after nominal independence.

In closing, our study has shown that Abdelhamid Benhedouga's *La mise à nu* is an important literary space for exploring the lingering shadows of colonialism in post-independence Algeria. By examining the complicated interplay of colonial history, national culture, and personal identity within a cultural hybridity framework, the book reveals how

patriarchal and colonial legacies continue to impact social connections and individual subjectivities.

Benhedouga emphasizes the ongoing struggles for agency and self-definition among women who are marginalized by both societal expectations and the internalized "Other" of patriarchal and colonial ideologies through the generational and gendered tensions embodied by characters such as Dalila and Naima. The novel therefore emphasizes the broken identities and subaltern positions that define postwar Algerian society, questioning the silence of suppressed voices and exposing the limitations of nationalist discourses that ignore internal hierarchies and gendered exclusions. Finally, La mise à nu is a major addition to postcolonial literature, providing subtle insights into the persistent issues of identity, power, and cultural belonging in Algeria's shifting social scene.

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PART TWO

Hybridity, Fragmentation, and Diasporic Archives

CHAPTER 3

Fragments against the Grain: Hybridity, Disrupted Memory, and the Postcolonial Diasporic Archive

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines how postcolonial diasporic literature and cinema challenge dominant ways of understanding history and identity. It argues that hybridity, often seen as a mix of cultures, is more than a blending of traditions; it is a powerful interruption of fixed historical narratives. Mainstream Eurocentric histories often follow a straight line: they focus on clear origins, stable national identities, and continuous timelines. In contrast, diasporic stories tend to break this pattern. They highlight broken family lines, inherited traumas, and complex experiences of time. The chapter draws on the ideas of key theorists such as Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Édouard Glissant, Paul Gilroy, and Walter Mignolo to show that cultural hybridity offers a different way of thinking about both time and knowledge. It is a form of resistance that challenges who gets to tell history, and how. Through a transdisciplinary lens, the chapter studies a selection of literary and cinematic works, including *The Buddha of Suburbia* by Hanif Kureishi, *Shérazade* by Leïla Sebbar, *Leaving Tangier* by Tahar Ben Jelloun, and the films *Atlantics* (2019) by Mati Diop and *A Screaming Man* (2010) by Mahamat-Saleh Haroun. These works do not aim to recover a pure or original cultural identity. Instead, they embrace fragmentation, uncertainty, and creative repetition to build new ways of remembering the past. They write from the space of rupture, where identity, memory, and belonging are always shifting. In doing so, diasporic artists create alternative archives, embodied, mobile, and

emotionally charged, that carry histories of trauma and survival. The chapter ultimately argues that hybridity in diaspora is not just about identity but about rethinking history itself. It becomes a decolonial method, one that imagines a future not tied to the timelines of empire, but open to new, shared worlds.

Keywords: Counter-Archives, Cultural Hybridity, Decolonial Historiography, Fragmented Memory, Postcolonial Diaspora

INTRODUCTION

The discourse of historical continuity, which is often celebrated in national historiographies as an unbroken narrative of cultural inheritance, linear progress, and rooted identity, has long served as the cornerstone of Western historical imagination. Such continuity, grounded in Eurocentric temporalities and the teleology of modernity, presupposes a stable subject located within a coherent, linear past. Yet the experience of diaspora, shaped by forced migration, exile, colonization, and hybridity, profoundly unsettles this epistemological architecture. For diasporic subjects, history is rarely a seamless narrative; it is a fragmented, often violent inheritance, marked by rupture, loss, and disjuncture. Thus, the central problem this chapter addresses is the inadequacy of Eurocentric historiographical frameworks to account for the cultural and historical consciousness of diasporic communities.

Diaspora, in this context, becomes more than a condition of spatial displacement, it becomes a temporal dislocation, a disruption of normative historical time. Postcolonial diasporic identities do not align with the linearity of Enlightenment historiography; rather, they inhabit what Homi Bhabha terms a "third space," in which identities are constructed through hybridity, negotiation, and difference (Bhabha 37). This third space challenges essentialist notions of origin and belonging, positioning cultural hybridity as a historical force that redefines what counts as legitimate memory, heritage, and historical continuity.

Several scholars have explored how diasporic narratives disrupt dominant historical paradigms. Stuart Hall (1990) argues that cultural identity in the diaspora is not an essence but a positioning, formed "through memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth." Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) critiques the "hyperreal Europe" at the heart of global historical consciousness, calling for a de-centering of European historicism in favor of plural temporalities. Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993) similarly locates diasporic modernity in the rupture of the Middle

Passage, asserting that the African diaspora created alternative modernities through hybridity and mobility, rather than rooted continuity. More recently, scholars such as Marianne Hirsch (2008) have introduced the concept of *postmemory*, to theorize the intergenerational transmission of traumatic historical experiences that resist closure.

Yet, while these contributions have advanced our understanding of diaspora and memory, there remains a lacuna in how cultural hybridity operates as both a historical and epistemological intervention. How does hybridity, beyond its aesthetic or cultural dimensions, interrupt and reconstitute notions of historical legitimacy? What temporalities emerge from diasporic cultural production when the past cannot be recovered, and the future cannot be imagined in terms of linear progress?

This chapter seeks to interrogate the intersection of cultural hybridity and historical discontinuity by reading postcolonial diasporic literature and cinema as critical sites of historiographical re-imagining. It focuses on how hybrid identities inscribed in South Asian-British fiction, Maghrebi Francophone exile writing, and African diasporic cinema disrupt nationalist and imperial historiographies. These cultural texts offer counter-historical narratives that contest notions of origin, authenticity, and linear time, positioning diasporic memory as a political and aesthetic practice.

This study is qualitative and interdisciplinary in nature, drawing on postcolonial theory, cultural studies, memory studies, and historiography. Through close textual analysis, it explores how diasporic artists and writers produce alternative archives of belonging that resist dominant temporal regimes. The chapter thus engages not only with *what* is remembered in diaspora, but *how* it is remembered, and more importantly, how such remembering rewrites history itself.

Research Questions

1. How does cultural hybridity in diasporic narratives challenge linear and Eurocentric conceptions of historical continuity?

2. In what ways do diasporic texts construct alternative temporalities and genealogies of identity through rupture and fragmentation?

3. What are the implications of these counter-historical narratives for decolonizing historiography?

1. Theoretical Framework

To explore how postcolonial diasporic narratives challenge dominant conceptions of history, this chapter draws upon a constellation of theoretical frameworks that foreground cultural hybridity, diasporic identity, and the politics of historical temporality. These frameworks, while distinct in their genealogies, converge in their critique of Eurocentric epistemologies and their investment in theorizing identity and history from the margins. Collectively, they allow for a nuanced reading of diasporic cultural production as a site of historical disruption, rather than continuity.

1.1. Homi Bhabha: Hybridity and the Third Space of Enunciation

Homi K. Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity as articulated in *The Location of Culture* (1994) is central to this study. For Bhabha, hybridity is not simply a blending of cultural forms but a radical negotiation of meaning that emerges in the "Third Space" of enunciation, where identities are constructed dialogically and contingently. This Third Space displaces the binary logic of colonizer/colonized and resists fixed cultural identities. It becomes a space of translation, ambiguity, and resistance, where the very categories of origin and tradition are re-inscribed (Bhabha 37–39). In the context of diasporic narratives, this space enables authors and artists to interrupt linear histories and propose new genealogies of self and community, built from fragments, contradictions, and ambivalences.

By invoking Bhabha's hybridity, this chapter approaches cultural texts not as transparent reflections of national or ethnic authenticity, but as performative negotiations, where meaning, memory, and identity are constantly contested and re-articulated. Hybridity, then, becomes both a methodological lens and a historical condition that destabilizes the authority of imperial historiography.

Moreover, Bhabha's formulation of hybridity as a space of *enunciation* underscores its temporal as well as spatial dimension. The hybrid subject inhabits the threshold between past and present, continuity and rupture, remembrance and reinvention. This temporality of "in-betweenness" challenges what Dipesh Chakrabarty terms the "homogeneous empty time" of Western historicism (Chakrabarty 23). Within the Third Space, history itself becomes a performative act; repeated, reimagined, and re-signified through the diasporic encounter. Thus, hybridity is not only about coexistence but about disruption: it interrupts the teleological

unfolding of colonial modernity by revealing the simultaneity of multiple times and epistemes that empire sought to silence. It exposes history as a site of negotiation rather than a stable continuum of progress or decline.

Furthermore, hybridity bears an ethical and political charge. It foregrounds the agency of those situated at the margins, those whom Frantz Fanon described as "condemned to the zone of non-being" (Black Skin, White Masks 8). By inhabiting the Third Space, the diasporic subject transforms marginality into a site of critical creativity. This act of re-signification resists what Gayatri Spivak calls "epistemic violence", the suppression of subaltern voices through dominant regimes of knowledge (Spivak 25). The hybrid subject, therefore, becomes an epistemic insurgent, challenging not only the fixity of cultural identity but also the authority of Western reason. Within diasporic art and literature, hybridity is thus both a poetics of survival and a politics of redefinition, allowing for histories to be retold through ambiguity, contradiction, and multiplicity rather than through the false coherence of colonial archives.

1.2. Stuart Hall: Identity as a Process of Becoming

In tandem with Bhabha's theorization, Stuart Hall's foundational essay *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1990) reframes identity as "a production, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (Hall 222). For Hall, diasporic identity is not an essence recovered through memory but a strategic and positional formation that emerges through historical rupture and cultural negotiation. It is shaped by "difference" as much as by similarity, and by "what we have become" as much as "what we once were" (Hall 225).

This formulation enables a critical shift away from essentialist notions of cultural purity or continuity. It invites attention to diasporic identity as a historical consciousness formed through discontinuity, where fragments of memory, myth, trauma, and resistance collide. Hall's emphasis on the dialogic and constructed nature of identity complements Bhabha's notion of the Third Space, providing a dynamic understanding of how cultural production both reflects and constructs identity in the diaspora.

Hall's intervention is particularly significant in how it recasts cultural identity as performative rather than ontological. Identity is not a fixed inheritance but a mode of becoming, continually reconstituted through narrative, language, and cultural representation. The diasporic subject, in this sense, is not merely displaced in space but also dispersed in time, inhabiting

multiple temporalities that defy the continuity presumed by nationalist historiography. As Hall asserts, "the past continues to speak to us, but it no longer addresses us as a simple, factual 'past'; it is always already reinterpreted through the present" (Hall 226). This temporal looping is crucial to the diasporic condition, in which memory and history are constantly reassembled through the pressures of migration, marginality, and longing. Identity thus becomes an act of narration, one that reclaims agency from the silencing structures of colonial discourse.

Moreover, Hall's concept of identity as a production "within representation" also underscores the politics of visibility and mediation that frame diasporic expression. Cultural forms, such as literature, film, music, and visual art, do not merely depict the diasporic experience; they actively produce and perform it. Representation becomes a site of struggle where meanings are contested and subjectivities are reimagined. This is particularly relevant to diasporic aesthetics that foreground hybridity, creolization, and intertextuality as strategies of both survival and resistance. Through these expressive practices, diasporic artists and writers translate displacement into form, generating what Hall later called "new ethnicities", plural, hybrid, and politically self-conscious (Hall, New Ethnicities 444). Such creative acts destabilize the authority of hegemonic cultural narratives and produce counter-discourses of belonging that challenge the binary oppositions of home/exile, center/margin, and authenticity/contamination.

Ultimately, Hall's redefinition of identity as a historical and representational process provides a powerful framework for reading diasporic texts as interventions in both cultural and epistemic history. It resonates with the broader postcolonial critique advanced by theorists like Paul Gilroy and Édouard Glissant, for whom diasporic identity is neither a residue of colonial displacement nor a loss to be mourned, but a creative practice of reassembling the self through difference. The diasporic subject, in Hall's vision, becomes an archivist of fragments, curating the traces of memory and history into new configurations of meaning. In doing so, Hall not only provincializes the Western notion of identity as stable and self-sufficient but also locates the future of postcolonial thought in the very condition of diasporic multiplicity.

1.3. Dipesh Chakrabarty: Provincializing Europe and Plural Temporalities

While Bhabha and Hall theorize the space and subject of diaspora, Dipesh Chakrabarty offers a critical lens on the temporality of historical thought. In *Provincializing Europe* (2000), Chakrabarty challenges the universalizing claims of Enlightenment historicism, which posit Europe as both the origin and the telos of modernity. He argues that such historicism is

complicit in marginalizing non-Western histories as "not yet modern," relegating them to an anachronistic past. Chakrabarty calls for the recognition of "heterotemporalities", the coexistence of multiple, overlapping forms of time and for the decolonization of historical thought itself.

In the context of diasporic hybridity, Chakrabarty's intervention reveals how diasporic texts enact temporal disobedience. They refuse to follow the linear script of progress, modernization, or civilizational ascent. Instead, they articulate historical subjectivities formed through rupture, recurrence, and simultaneity, thus provincializing not only Europe, but also the very grammar of historical continuity. This chapter uses Chakrabarty's work to analyze how diasporic narratives construct counter-temporalities that resist the developmentalist logic of the nation-state and its imperial past.

Chakrabarty's critique of historicism dismantles the chronopolitical hierarchy that positions Europe as temporally advanced and the Global South as belated. His notion of "heterotemporality" insists that subaltern histories cannot be assimilated into the singular, secular time of the Enlightenment, for such assimilation perpetuates colonial epistemic violence. Diasporic texts embody this resistance by foregrounding asynchronous experiences of time, the persistence of ancestral memory within modernity, the recurrence of colonial trauma in postcolonial life, and the simultaneity of mourning and becoming. As Chakrabarty writes, "the time of capital and the time of gods, spirits, and ancestors coexist, though they are not commensurable" (Chakrabarty 73). In diasporic narratives, this coexistence manifests in the temporal layering of the self: the migrant's consciousness oscillates between past and present, homeland and hostland, tradition and reinvention. Such heterotemporal subjectivity challenges the Eurocentric notion of history as a uniform march toward progress and instead affirms a plurality of times that coexist, conflict, and converse.

Moreover, Chakrabarty's call to provincialize Europe resonates profoundly with the aesthetics of hybridity examined throughout this chapter. Just as Bhabha and Hall displace spatial and cultural binaries, Chakrabarty displaces temporal hierarchies, exposing how modernity's claim to universality depends on the exclusion of non-European temporalities. Diasporic writers and filmmakers engage this critique by producing narratives that interrupt the chronological order of empire, deploying circular structures, flashbacks, spectral hauntings, and non-linear storytelling to convey the uneven rhythms of diasporic existence. These works reject the Enlightenment ideal of homogeneous, empty time and instead propose what Walter Mignolo

later terms "decolonial time", a temporality attuned to the fractures, silences, and survivals of colonial history (Mignolo 82). In this sense, diasporic hybridity becomes not only a spatial negotiation between cultures but also a temporal insurgency that reclaims the right to inhabit multiple historical worlds simultaneously.

Ultimately, Chakrabarty's intervention situates the diasporic imagination within a broader epistemic project of decolonizing time. By reading diasporic cultural production through his lens, we can understand how memory, myth, and affect operate as forms of historical knowledge that exceed Western rationalism. The diasporic subject, moving between worlds, embodies a critique of modernity itself: they are both within and beyond history, both the product and the critic of its linear logic. As such, diasporic hybridity performs what Chakrabarty envisioned as the "pluralization of history", a practice that liberates the past from the singular authority of Europe and opens it to a multiplicity of futures.

1.4. Édouard Glissant: Creolization and Opacity

The Caribbean theorist Édouard Glissant brings a poetics of relation to this theoretical constellation. In *Poetics of Relation* (1997), Glissant introduces the concept of creolization, a process of unpredictable, non-hierarchical cultural mixing that resists purity and transparency. He champions the right to opacity, challenging the Western demand to render all cultural difference intelligible within a dominant epistemic framework. In diasporic contexts, creolization foregrounds cultural multiplicity as a condition of being, not an exception. It positions hybrid identities as inherently resistant to totalizing narratives of identity or history. Glissant's work thus deepens this chapter's engagement with hybridity, not only as a disruptive force but also as a relational and ethical practice. It informs an analysis of how diasporic texts enact a creolized historiography, refusing closure and embracing the provisional, the opaque, and the entangled.

What Glissant calls "Relation" operates as both a poetics and an epistemology, a mode of understanding the world through interconnection without reduction. Relation rejects the Western ideal of universal transparency that seeks to categorize and stabilize difference; instead, it acknowledges the world's irreducible complexity and interdependence. In this sense, creolization is not merely a cultural or linguistic process but a philosophy of becoming, one that valorizes flux, unpredictability, and coexistence. As Glissant asserts, "Creolization is not a fusion but an encounter; it is not an essence, but a continual process" (Glissant 34). Diasporic

identities, situated between multiple linguistic, racial, and historical coordinates, embody this process of continual becoming. They exist in perpetual translation—between languages, temporalities, and epistemologies, thus subverting the colonial desire for rootedness and coherence. The diasporic subject, in Glissant's vision, does not seek to resolve contradiction but to inhabit it, to let multiplicity itself become a source of knowledge.

Moreover, Glissant's "right to opacity" has profound ethical implications for postcolonial and diasporic representation. To claim opacity is to resist the colonial impulse to know, classify, and possess the Other under the pretext of understanding. As he writes, "Opacity is not enclosure; it is the force that protects diversity" (Glissant 190). In diasporic literature and film, this right manifests through strategies of narrative indeterminacy, linguistic blending, and temporal fragmentation, which protect difference from the assimilative gaze of the dominant culture. These aesthetic choices do not signify ambiguity for its own sake, but rather a deliberate refusal to allow subaltern experience to be domesticated by Western epistemic norms. The opacity of the diasporic voice becomes an act of resistance, an ethical stance that affirms alterity while rejecting the violence of transparent translation.

Through this lens, Glissant's theory expands the discussion of hybridity beyond Bhabha's spatial "Third Space" or Hall's discursive construction of identity to include a planetary ethics of relation. His creolized poetics imagines historical time itself as relational, nonlinear, recursive, and coeval. This framework allows diasporic cultural production to be read as a relational archive, where fragments, silences, and hybridities are not signs of loss but of living connection. The diasporic archive, therefore, is not a repository of fixed origins but a dynamic field of exchanges, continually rewriting the terms of belonging. Glissant's vision of a world in Relation helps articulate a decolonial historiography that values plurality over universality, opacity over mastery, and entanglement over isolation. It is through this poetics of Relation that the hybrid subject transforms displacement into a generative encounter, and history, once a tool of domination, into a space of ethical co-presence and mutual becoming.

1.5. Paul Gilroy: The Black Atlantic and Diasporic Modernity

In *The Black Atlantic* (1993), Paul Gilroy radically reconfigures modernity by foregrounding the transatlantic slave trade and its aftermath as foundational, rather than peripheral, to Western civilization. He conceptualizes the Black Atlantic as a counterculture of modernity, a space where the forced mobility and cultural hybridity of African diasporas

generate new forms of political and artistic expression. Gilroy's diasporic modernity is fluid, transnational, and anti-essentialist, built on historical rupture and cultural recombination. Gilroy's framework affirms this chapter's central argument: that diaspora is not an aftermath of history, but a historical agent that produces alternative modernities. His work is especially useful for analyzing diasporic cinema and literature as mobile archives that refuse the fixity of national history and racial identity.

Central to Gilroy's argument is the assertion that modernity itself is inseparable from the history of racial slavery, colonialism, and displacement. The Enlightenment's claims to universal freedom and rationality were built upon the violent exclusions of the transatlantic system that commodified African bodies and erased their intellectual and cultural contributions from the narrative of Western progress. By repositioning the Black diaspora at the center of modernity, Gilroy destabilizes the binary between Europe and its "others," demonstrating that European civilization was always already hybrid, entangled in the flows of people, music, language, and resistance that circulated across the Atlantic. He writes, "The history of the black Atlantic… continually crisscrosses the ocean in a pattern of cultural exchange that transcends both the structures of the nation-state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity" (Gilroy 19). This crisscrossing of cultural routes exemplifies what this chapter identifies as the epistemic and temporal mobility of diaspora, a condition that both exposes and redefines the relational foundations of historical knowledge.

Moreover, Gilroy's notion of a counterculture of modernity reclaims black expressive forms, spirituals, blues, jazz, and later literature and film—as vehicles of historical consciousness and resistance. These art forms translate the unspeakable trauma of slavery and displacement into new grammars of feeling and remembrance, what he calls "living memory." The Black Atlantic's aesthetic production is thus not merely cultural but historiographical: it writes history through rhythm, improvisation, and embodiment, disrupting the linear temporality of Western historicism. In diasporic cinema and literature, this translates into non-linear narratives, intertextuality, and affective temporality, modes that transform the archive of pain into an archive of creativity. Gilroy's emphasis on performativity and movement resonates strongly with Glissant's poetics of Relation and Bhabha's Third Space, framing hybridity not as a crisis of identity but as a radical politics of becoming, wherein cultural forms constantly evolve through encounter, adaptation, and remixing.

Ultimately, Gilroy's reconfiguration of modernity has profound implications for understanding diaspora as an epistemological project. The Black Atlantic rejects the insularity of nationalist paradigms and replaces them with a transoceanic imaginary that recognizes interconnectedness across histories of violence and survival. In this sense, Gilroy's work bridges the gap between postcolonial critique and cultural theory: it proposes that the experience of diaspora itself generates an alternative modernity grounded in relationality, hybridity, and memory. For this chapter, Gilroy's theoretical intervention illuminates how diasporic texts and films enact this countercultural modernity by transforming displacement into creative reconstruction, turning the detritus of empire into new forms of historical knowledge. Through their movements across languages, genres, and geographies, these works affirm Gilroy's enduring claim that "the history of the black Atlantic is continually in motion, continually being made and remade" (Gilroy 19).

1.6. Walter Mignolo: Border Epistemologies and Decoloniality

Finally, Walter Mignolo's theory of border epistemologies provides a decolonial framework for understanding how knowledge itself is shaped by histories of imperial domination. In *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* (2011), Mignolo argues for epistemic disobedience and the recognition of knowledge from the border, produced by those whose histories have been silenced or devalued by colonial epistemologies. Diasporic narratives, then, become acts of border thinking, articulating forms of knowledge and memory that fall outside dominant historical paradigms.

This perspective underscores the epistemological stakes of diasporic hybridity: it is not simply about cultural fusion, but about interrupting the knowledge structures that define what counts as history, whose voices are legitimate, and which futures are imaginable.

For Mignolo, border epistemologies emerge from the colonial difference; the gap between those who produce global knowledge and those who are rendered its objects. The "border" is not merely geographic but epistemic and ontological, marking the site where modernity and coloniality co-exist as two sides of the same process. As he writes, "there is no modernity without coloniality" (Mignolo 39). The Western epistemic project universalized its own worldview by erasing or subordinating other systems of knowing, thereby institutionalizing the coloniality of knowledge. In this context, diasporic narratives, whether literary, cinematic, or oral, constitute counter-epistemologies that resist this universalizing

violence. Their hybrid aesthetics, multilingual forms, and non-linear temporalities function as modes of knowing otherwise, challenging the monopoly of Western rationalism. When diasporic writers and filmmakers craft stories that blend oral memory, myth, and personal testimony, they enact precisely what Mignolo calls border thinking: they think from the cracks of empire, transforming the wounds of displacement into epistemic openings.

Furthermore, Mignolo's emphasis on epistemic disobedience is crucial to understanding the political agency of the diasporic subject. To disobey epistemically is to reject the idea that truth, reason, and progress are exclusively Western categories. It is to claim the legitimacy of knowledge grounded in lived experience, embodied memory, and relational being. Diasporic hybridity thus becomes a decolonial gesture, not because it reconciles difference, but because it exposes the partiality of so-called universal truths. The diasporic intellectual, like the border thinker, occupies an in-between space where competing epistemes intersect; what Aníbal Quijano calls the "colonial matrix of power", and from this liminal position, they generate new ways of seeing and narrating history (Quijano 533). Such epistemic acts re-inscribe history from below, validating voices once deemed subaltern or peripheral.

In this sense, Mignolo's framework situates diaspora as an epistemological frontier, a space where knowledge, identity, and temporality are continually renegotiated. The hybridity of diasporic texts is not only aesthetic but cognitive, it represents an alternative consciousness that refuses the compartmentalization of modern Western thought. These works expose the fragility of imperial epistemologies by performing multiplicity and contradiction rather than coherence. In so doing, they participate in what Mignolo calls the decolonial turn: the ongoing, unfinished effort to delink from colonial systems of meaning and imagine futures beyond the logic of empire. The diasporic archive, be it textual, visual, and oral, thus becomes an enactment of border epistemology itself: a living testament to how knowledge from the margins can resist erasure and reconstitute the meaning of history, humanity, and belonging.

Taken together, these theoretical interventions construct a multidimensional framework for reading diasporic hybridity as both an aesthetic and epistemic revolution. Homi Bhabha locates hybridity within the Third Space, a site of cultural negotiation that dislodges binary oppositions and generates new forms of enunciation. Stuart Hall complements this by conceiving identity as a production in process, where memory, rupture, and representation converge to form new subjectivities. Dipesh Chakrabarty provincializes the linear temporality of European historicism, exposing the coexistence of heterotemporalities that resist modernity's

singular narrative of progress. Édouard Glissant's poetics of Relation expands hybridity into a planetary ethic grounded in opacity, unpredictability, and coexistence, while Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic repositions diaspora as the motor of modernity, revealing how transnational circulations of people and culture reshape historical consciousness. Finally, Walter Mignolo's theory of border epistemologies situates these hybrid and relational practices within a decolonial critique of knowledge itself, showing how subaltern histories and aesthetic forms perform epistemic disobedience against the colonial matrix of power.

Together, these thinkers articulate diaspora not as an aftermath of empire but as a critical condition of knowing and being in the modern world. Diasporic hybridity, when viewed through this constellation, becomes a form of historical thought that unsettles the authority of linear time, disrupts imperial narratives of progress, and reimagines the archive from below. It is within this dialogical intersection of cultural negotiation, epistemic insurgency, and temporal rupture that diasporic texts, whether literary or cinematic, find their transformative power. The following section turns to Hanif Kureishi's The Buddha of Suburbia as a compelling articulation of these dynamics, illustrating how diasporic subjectivity, performed through hybridity, rewrites the historical script of empire from within its metropolitan center.

2. Hybrid Identity and Historical Disruption in South Asian-British Literature

Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) stands as a seminal postcolonial novel that interrogates the cultural and historical politics of British identity through the lens of a hybrid protagonist. Set in the socio-politically volatile landscape of 1970s London, a period marked by the waning of the British Empire, rising immigration, and emergent cultural pluralism, the novel offers a trenchant critique of the myth of national coherence. Through the character of Karim Amir, a mixed-race, bisexual teenager of Indian and English descent, Kureishi explores how diasporic hybridity functions as a site of historical disruption, undermining both essentialist identity categories and the linear temporality of British historiography.

Karim's hybrid identity becomes a locus of both alienation and creative reinvention. He is "an Englishman born and bred, almost," yet perpetually marked as other by both the white middle class and immigrant communities (Kureishi 3). His racial ambiguity, compounded by his queer sexual explorations and class liminality, positions him in what Bhabha terms the

"Third Space", a liminal zone where identity is negotiated rather than inherited (Bhabha 38). This hybrid positioning enables Karim to act as a destabilizing agent within British cultural memory, challenging its imperial nostalgia and national self-image.

Kureishi's narrative functions as a counter-history, re-inscribing voices and experiences that are marginalized in dominant British historiography. Karim's father, Haroon, who performs the role of a spiritual guru for white suburbanites despite his bureaucratic origins, becomes a satirical figure through which Kureishi critiques white liberal orientalism and the fetishization of the "mystic East." Haroon's performances do not reclaim authenticity but instead expose the performativity of identity in a post-imperial context. These staged spiritual sessions parody both British colonial constructions of the East and postcolonial appropriations of identity, revealing the hollowness of essentialist self-representations.

Moreover, Kureishi disrupts national temporalities by foregrounding the disjointed experiences of youth, race, and sexuality against the backdrop of British deindustrialization and Thatcherite nationalism. The novel's temporal structure resists conventional bildungsroman trajectories; Karim does not achieve integration or resolution but instead embodies the fragmentation and multiplicity of diasporic subjectivity. His journey, rather than culminating in assimilation or belonging, unfolds as a series of disorienting encounters that reflect the fractured experience of growing up in a society grappling with its colonial past.

This historical rupture is further amplified by the novel's ironic tone and intertextual play with British cultural icons, such as Shakespeare, the Beatles, punk music, and British theatre, suggesting that Britishness itself is a constructed narrative subject to revision. Kureishi places Karim in spaces traditionally associated with British high culture (e.g., theatre and elite education) only to expose their exclusions and hypocrisies. In doing so, he participates in what Stuart Hall calls the "decentering of the subject", a critical move in postcolonial thought that refuses fixed cultural or historical positions (Hall 227).The novel also inscribes what Paul Gilroy terms "diasporic modernity," as Karim's journey from the suburbs to the city mirrors the spatial and symbolic transitions of postcolonial subjects navigating the ruins of empire (Gilroy 2–3). London becomes a multicultural palimpsest where histories of migration, resistance, and cultural remixing play out, often in conflictual and contradictory ways. Karim's mobility, both physical and cultural, serves not as a teleological progression but as a testament to discontinuity, improvisation, and transformation.

In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Kureishi not only narrates the experience of a postcolonial subject negotiating the fraught terrain of identity, race, and sexuality, but also rewrites history itself from within its margins. The novel refuses to mourn a lost authenticity or valorize origin; instead, it affirms the creative potential of hybridity as an epistemic and aesthetic disruption of the historical record. Through satire, irony, and fluidity, Kureishi's work enacts a decolonial practice of self-fashioning, one that foregrounds fragmentation over unity, improvisation over origin, and relation over purity.

Thus, the novel exemplifies how postcolonial literature functions not simply as a mirror of diasporic experience, but as an active intervention into historical discourse, reclaiming the right to narrate history from below, from between, and from beyond the borders of the nation-state.

3. Francophone Maghrebi Writers and the Language of Exile

The writings of Francophone Maghrebi authors such as Leïla Sebbar and Tahar Ben Jelloun offer a complex meditation on linguistic hybridity, colonial memory, and diasporic displacement, illuminating the cultural and symbolic tensions embedded in postcolonial identity formation. Emerging from the long shadow of French colonialism in North Africa, these authors inhabit a linguistic double-bind: they write in the language of the former colonizer (French), yet their syntax, rhythm, and imagery are haunted by the echoes of Arabic, Berber, and indigenous oral traditions. This fractured linguistic landscape becomes both the site and the symbol of exile, a terrain where belonging is perpetually deferred and where expression itself becomes an act of survival. In this sense, language is not a transparent medium but a palimpsest of power, a contested space through which colonial history is remembered, resisted, and rewritten.

The predicament of these writers encapsulates what Homi K. Bhabha identifies as the "unhomely": the disquieting condition in which the boundaries between personal and political histories, between private memory and public narrative, collapse into one another (Bhabha 13). Writing from the interstices of cultures, Sebbar and Ben Jelloun transform their linguistic exile into an aesthetic and epistemic resource. Their texts articulate the diasporic condition as a negotiation between worlds, the inherited idioms of colonial domination and the silenced resonances of indigenous identity. The French they use is not the French of the metropole; it is

fractured, defamiliarized, and haunted by absence, what Jacques Derrida might describe as a language that "bears within itself the mark of its own translation" (Derrida 213).

This linguistic displacement is more than a stylistic choice; it signifies a deeper epistemological struggle, the attempt to speak history from within the language that once sought to erase it. For writers of the Maghrebi diaspora, French becomes at once the instrument of alienation and the medium of articulation. It is the tongue of empire and yet the only available voice of testimony. In the act of writing, they transform the colonial language into a field of ambivalence, re-signifying its violence into creativity, its domination into expression. This paradox situates their works within the broader discourse of postcolonial language politics, echoing Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's insistence that "the language of the colonizer carries the weight of imperial history," while simultaneously acknowledging, as Assia Djebar does, that writing in French can also become a means of haunting the colonizer with what they tried to erase (Ngũgĩ 16; Djebar 132).

Through this act of writing, Sebbar and Ben Jelloun perform what Édouard Glissant would call a poetics of relation, a literary creolization in which identities are no longer bound to origin but are continually reconstituted through encounters, translations, and dislocations. Their prose stages the encounter between languages, temporalities, and memories, producing hybrid texts that oscillate between nostalgia and estrangement, belonging and exile. This poetics of the in-between not only reflects the lived experience of postcolonial displacement but also challenges the epistemic boundaries of history itself. Their writing exposes how colonial legacies persist in the fabric of language, thought, and representation, rendering the very act of narration a form of historical and decolonial labor.

Hence, Sebbar's Shérazade (1982) and Ben Jelloun's Leaving Tangier (2006) can be read as diasporic palimpsests, layered with the sediment of colonial history, migration, and resistance. Each narrative reveals how the linguistic and affective economies of exile shape postcolonial subjectivity. The French they wield becomes a border language, inhabited by voices from elsewhere, voices of mothers who spoke Arabic, fathers silenced by colonial trauma, and communities displaced by economic migration. Through their creative engagement with the French language, these authors transform exile into a site of cultural re-inscription. Their texts enact what Walter Mignolo terms "border thinking", the production of knowledge from the fissures of empire, from those epistemic margins where new forms of meaning emerge (Mignolo 67).

In this light, the literature of Francophone Maghrebi writers does not merely recount displacement; it performs it. Their prose embodies the paradox of speaking from the center in a language that once spoke over them, turning the colonizer's tongue into an instrument of critique, beauty, and reimagined belonging. The following subsections explore how this complex relationship between language, history, and exile unfolds across Sebbar's and Ben Jelloun's works, how language becomes both a site of violence and creation, how nostalgia and ambivalence reconfigure postcolonial temporality, and how writing across linguistic fault lines transforms the very notion of the historical archive.

3.1. Language as a Site of Violence and Creation

The French language, as both a colonial imposition and a medium of literary expression, functions ambivalently in Maghrebi diasporic literature. For writers like Sebbar and Ben Jelloun, French is not merely a tool of articulation but a wound, a reminder of the symbolic violence of colonization. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argues, the language of empire "carries the weight of imperialist history" (Ngũgĩ 16), and writing in French thus entails an ongoing confrontation with the structures of domination embedded in language itself.

In *Shérazade* (1982), Leïla Sebbar presents a protagonist whose fragmented identity mirrors the linguistic hybridity of her narration. The novel follows a teenage girl of Algerian descent who escapes from a French detention center and wanders through Paris, grappling with her identity as an Arab girl raised in a language and culture that has dislocated her from her origins. Sebbar's prose deliberately integrates registers of Arabic speech, street slang, and poetic French, refusing syntactic homogeneity. The result is a narrative space that reflects what Jacques Derrida might term *différance*, a textual deferral that undermines the fixity of meaning and identity (Derrida 23). By writing in a French that resists the normative grammar of the Republic, Sebbar enacts what Chandra Talpade Mohanty describes as a "decolonial feminist language", one that disrupts the syntactic empire of the nation-state (Mohanty 78).

Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Leaving Tangier* (*Partir*, 2006) similarly explores the trauma of displacement and the failure of belonging through the lens of migration. His protagonist, Azel, yearns to escape the stagnation of postcolonial Morocco and dreams of a better life in Europe. Yet upon arrival in Spain, he confronts not liberation, but a form of existential exile, where neither geography nor language can offer coherence. Ben Jelloun's lyrical French, laced with Moroccan idioms and Islamic philosophical allusions, resists assimilation into either a

monolithic French literary tradition or an "authentic" Maghrebi voice. The novel thus reflects what Édouard Glissant terms *creolization*, a process that acknowledges entanglement, opacity, and relational identity without the need for purity or resolution (Glissant 140).

3.2. Nostalgia, Ambivalence, and Postcolonial Temporalities

Both *Shérazade* and *Leaving Tangier* are suffused with postcolonial nostalgia, a longing not for a recoverable homeland but for a lost temporal coherence, a sense of self that predates rupture. This nostalgia is not restorative but reflective, to borrow Svetlana Boym's distinction; it mourns the impossibility of return rather than attempting to recreate the past (Boym 49). The ambivalence of their characters, at once drawn to and repelled by both France and North Africa, expresses what Stuart Hall describes as "identities that are always in process, always constituted within representation, never outside it" (Hall 226).

This sense of ambivalence extends to their representations of time. In *Shérazade*, time unfolds in nonlinear flashes, memory fragments, and erratic movement across the cityscape, resisting the narrative structure of chronological development. Similarly, in *Leaving Tangier*, the migration journey is not a teleological progression toward fulfillment but a spiral of detours, betrayals, and returns. Both texts reject the Enlightenment ideal of historical linearity and instead reflect what Walter Mignolo calls "border temporalities", an epistemic disobedience to colonial time (Mignolo 60).

3.3. Writing Across Fault Lines: Language as Archive and Refusal

Writing in the language of the colonizer does not signify capitulation; rather, Sebbar and Ben Jelloun re-purpose French as a site of resistance and hybrid expression. Their works function as counter-archives, resisting national historiographies that seek to either erase or instrumentalize Maghrebi memory. As Assia Djebar famously noted, "writing in French is not a betrayal, but a way of haunting the colonizer with the stories they tried to erase" (Djebar, *Fantasia* 132). In this sense, language becomes both a burden and a weapon, an uneasy home where exile and expression coexist.

These writers are not merely producing literature; they are inscribing alternative historical epistemologies, ones that fracture the smooth temporality of the French republican ideal and instead foreground trauma, rupture, and survival. Their hybrid linguistic practices and ambivalent narrative structures give form to the diasporic condition as one of epistemic and

temporal dislocation, a condition that refuses to be subsumed under national allegory or imperial nostalgia.

4. African Diasporic Cinema: Visualizing Hybridity and Fragmented Memory

While literary narratives have long been central to theorizing postcolonial hybridity and historical discontinuity, African diasporic cinema offers a uniquely visual and sensorial language through which the ruptures of memory, displacement, and cultural entanglement are rendered embodied and affective. Film, with its capacity to weave sound, image, and temporality, transforms the representation of history into an experiential encounter, making visible what is often repressed or unspeakable in textual form. In particular, the works of Mati Diop and Mahamat-Saleh Haroun exemplify how cinema can function as both archive and disturbance, revealing the psychic and political afterlives of colonialism. Their films do not present history as a linear narrative to be consumed but as a haunting, a process of visual and emotional re-inscription that unsettles the boundaries between past and present, loss and continuity, realism and dream.

In this context, African diasporic cinema becomes an arena of postmemorial creation, engaging with what Marianne Hirsch describes as "the affective residues of inherited trauma" that persist across generations (Hirsch 107). These films inhabit the temporal and emotional spaces left behind by historical violence—the unburied ghosts of the Middle Passage, colonial exploitation, and postcolonial migration. Yet, rather than simply recalling trauma, they translate it into form, using silence, shadow, repetition, and rhythm to materialize the spectral dimension of memory. By foregrounding what Tina Campt calls "listening to images"; an attentiveness to the quiet gestures and sonic traces of black diasporic experience, such films reimagine history as a felt temporality rather than a documented sequence (Campt 8).

Crucially, these cinematic practices displace the authority of the written archive and instead construct what Achille Mbembe terms a "living archive," one animated by affect, embodiment, and absence (Mbembe 19). In this visual archive, history is not stored but performed, its meanings constantly shifting through soundscapes, gestures, and fragmented imagery. The African diaspora, often portrayed through the lens of loss, is here transformed into a site of epistemic production, where hybrid aesthetics; merging realism with mysticism, ethnography with abstraction, reflect the fractured consciousness of postcolonial modernity.

Through their visual syntax, Diop and Haroun foreground the contradictions of diasporic temporality: the persistence of ancestral haunting within modern urban landscapes, the repetition of exile as both a wound and a mode of survival, and the unstable negotiation between home and elsewhere.

Moreover, the cinematic lens allows for a collective reimagining of memory beyond the individual subject, translating diasporic experience into shared visual affect. As Laura Marks observes, intercultural cinema operates through haptic visuality, where touch, rhythm, and texture replace narrative explanation as means of knowing (Marks 163). This sensory approach resonates with diasporic forms of remembering, which are often non-verbal, embodied, and fragmented. Through this haptic engagement, African diasporic cinema produces a form of visual hybridity, one that resists closure, linear causality, and the aesthetic hierarchies of Western cinematic realism. Instead, these films open the frame to opacity, ambiguity, and slowness, privileging contemplation over mastery.

Thus, the films of Diop and Haroun stand as decolonial interventions in cinematic historiography. They challenge the conventions of representation imposed by both colonial ethnography and global modernism, refusing to reduce African experiences to sociological illustration or exotic spectacle. Their works articulate a counter-visuality that, as Nicholas Mirzoeff suggests, contests the "visuality of authority" by producing images that expose rather than conceal the violence of the colonial gaze (Mirzoeff 3). Through silence, stillness, and spectral imagery, they reposition African cinema as an aesthetic of witness, a means of thinking with the ghosts of history rather than seeking to master them.

Within this framework, the following analyses examine how Diop's Atlantics and Haroun's A Screaming Man visualize hybridity, dislocation, and memory as ongoing negotiations with postcolonial time. Atlantics transforms the Atlantic Ocean; once a conduit of slavery and empire, into a spectral border where the drowned return as witnesses of unresolved injustice. Haroun's A Screaming Man, by contrast, internalizes exile, exploring how silence, masculinity, and generational displacement embody the psychic scars of postcolonial conflict. Both filmmakers transform cinema into a form of embodied historiography, one that resists closure and foregrounds the hybrid temporality of diasporic existence. Through their visual and narrative strategies, they show that the African diaspora does not merely recall a traumatic past, it redefines the very means through which history, memory, and belonging can be seen and felt.

4.1. Mati Diop's *Atlantics*: Ghosts of Migration, Echoes of Empire

Mati Diop's *Atlantics* (*Atlantique*, 2019) is a haunting meditation on the intertwined histories of migration, gender, labor exploitation, and colonial afterlives. Set in the outskirts of Dakar, Senegal, the film follows a group of construction workers who, after months of unpaid labor, attempt a perilous journey across the Atlantic in search of economic opportunity in Europe. Their disappearance is soon followed by strange occurrences: their spirits return to inhabit the bodies of women, demanding justice and retribution.

Diop's choice to blend social realism with supernatural elements disrupts the linear temporality of migration narratives. The spectral return of the drowned men does not simply symbolize loss; it invokes a counter-historical logic in which the dead speak, and the silenced are given voice. As Achille Mbembe argues, "the postcolony is haunted by ghosts... not yet buried," and Diop's cinematic language renders this haunting palpable (Mbembe 16). The ocean, often mythologized as a border between continents, is refigured as a graveyard of imperial ambition and neocolonial betrayal, echoing Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*, which positions the sea as a site of both terror and cultural transmission (Gilroy 4).

Moreover, Diop's aesthetics, lingering shots of the ocean, surreal lighting, non-linear narrative progression, create a sense of temporal dislocation, aligning with Dipesh Chakrabarty's call to provincialize the modernist conception of homogeneous, empty time (Chakrabarty 15). The film's refusal to offer resolution or closure affirms the diasporic condition as one of unfinished mourning and historical interruption, a recurring theme throughout this chapter.

4.2. Mahamat-Saleh Haroun's *A Screaming Man*: Silence, Generational Displacement, and the Postcolonial Wound

In *A Screaming Man* (2010), Chadian director Mahamat-Saleh Haroun explores the internal diaspora of civil conflict, economic precarity, and intergenerational fracture. The film centers on Adam, a former swimming champion turned hotel pool attendant, who is gradually displaced, both socially and emotionally, when his son is given his position amid political unrest. The narrative unfolds with deliberate slowness, punctuated by long silences, minimalist dialogue, and stark visual composition.

Haroun constructs what Laura Marks describes as "haptic cinema," wherein the tactile aesthetics, textures, sounds, bodily movement, stand in for explicit historical exposition (Marks 162). The film's refusal to historicize the civil war or name the exact political factions reflects the silencing of history in many postcolonial African contexts. Instead of grand historical narration, Haroun offers a quiet unraveling of the personal, showing how postcolonial violence seeps into the domestic, the familial, the intimate.

Adam's internal crisis, his sense of dispossession, guilt, and confusion, is deeply tied to colonial legacies of masculinity, honor, and generational authority. His inability to articulate his grief mirrors the inarticulability of historical trauma, particularly in regions where formal archival histories are minimal or censored. In this way, Haroun's film becomes a visual archive of affective history, capturing the invisible weight of the postcolonial condition. As Bhabha notes, the unspoken, the liminal, and the uncanny often constitute the most potent forms of historical memory (Bhabha 12).

4.3. Cinema as Embodied Historiography

Both *Atlantics* and *A Screaming Man* disrupt the visual grammar of Western cinema by refusing narrative closure, linear progression, and didactic historical exposition. In rejecting the conventions of realism and teleological storytelling, they break from the epistemic order of Western historicism. Instead, these films construct what Walter Mignolo calls "border thinking"; a mode of knowledge that emerges from the margins, from silence, and from refusal (Mignolo 88). Through this aesthetic and epistemic disobedience, they challenge the assumption that history must be told through chronological coherence or heroic narrative. Their temporal disruptions, spectral imagery, and affective silences produce what might be termed embodied historiographies, in which the body itself becomes an archive: a living repository of trauma, memory, and resistance.

In *Atlantics,* the return of drowned migrants as spectral presences reconfigures history as a haunting rather than a record. The dead do not rest in the past, they intrude into the present, demanding justice and recognition. The body of the migrant, rendered invisible in global capitalism and reduced to an economic abstraction, reappears in Diop's film as a site of epistemic recovery, where the unacknowledged histories of labor and gender exploitation return in ghostly form. This visual strategy recalls Achille Mbembe's notion of necropolitics, wherein modern sovereignty defines who may live and who must die, and whose death counts as history

(Mbembe 17). By giving spectral agency to the dead, Diop reverses this logic, transforming cinema into a ritual of reanimation, a means of writing the bodies erased from the annals of migration and empire back into being.

Conversely, Haroun's *A Screaming Man* transforms stillness into a cinematic language of mourning. The protagonist's body; marked by exhaustion, guilt, and silence, embodies the psychic residue of postcolonial collapse. His motionless gestures and muted voice register what Tina Campt has called "listening to images": an attention to quiet, embodied frequencies of historical experience that resist narrative articulation (Campt 6). Haroun's use of silence becomes an act of resistance against both the noise of global modernity and the violence of political amnesia. The absence of dialogue and the slow pacing create a cinema of affective duration, where time stretches, falters, and folds back upon itself. This manipulation of temporality allows the spectator to feel history not as progression, but as weight; an experience closer to what Walter Benjamin described as the "*constellation*" of past and present that disrupts homogeneous time (Benjamin 263).

Both directors thus expand the grammar of postcolonial storytelling by turning cinema into a space of embodied remembrance. Their visual language redefines how the past inhabits the present, not through facts or monuments, but through movement, rhythm, and corporeal memory. The camera lingers on bodies in transit, gestures suspended in longing, faces caught between grief and defiance. Through this poetics of stillness and spectrality, these films transform cinema into a medium of affective historiography: history is not narrated but felt, not reconstructed but re-lived through the sensorium of image and sound. As Laura Marks suggests in her theory of haptic visuality, such cinema "addresses itself to the body before the mind," privileging touch, texture, and sensation as modes of historical knowledge (Marks 162). In this sense, both Atlantics and A Screaming Man make history tangible, translating collective trauma into visual and sensory experience.

These visual narratives therefore redefine diasporic hybridity not merely as a cultural mixture but as a temporal and embodied rupture. They insist that the past is not a closed chapter but a living presence, one that continues to shape the gestures, silences, and desires of the postcolonial present. The return of ghosts, the inheritance of silence, and the repetition of loss become aesthetic strategies through which cinema articulates the unresolved tensions of modern African histories. In refusing the closure of redemption or reconciliation, Diop and Haroun

compel the viewer to dwell within incompleteness, to inhabit history as wound, echo, and possibility.

Ultimately, African diasporic cinema performs an epistemic intervention. It contests the hegemony of written archives and official memory by privileging the body as a site of knowledge and the image as a medium of resistance. Through spectral storytelling, affective rhythm, and temporal fragmentation, these films reshape how history can be remembered, re-inscribed, and resisted. They turn cinematic form into a practice of decolonial historiography, revealing that to visualize the diaspora is not to illustrate exile but to embody the act of remembering otherwise.

Through the embodied poetics of films such as Atlantics and A Screaming Man, African diasporic cinema exposes hybridity not only as a cultural or aesthetic phenomenon, but as a temporal and epistemic act of resistance. These visual narratives inhabit the thresholds of time and space, where memory lingers, where the colonial past bleeds into the postcolonial present, and where history becomes a spectral continuum rather than a finished archive. By reconfiguring cinematic time and reanimating the erased body, they perform the work of decolonizing both seeing and knowing. The hybrid subject that emerges from these films; at once spectral and embodied, fragmented and whole, reclaims history through affect and imagination. It is here, in this intersection between the visual and the temporal, the corporeal and the epistemic, that hybridity reveals its full political potency: not merely as cultural fusion, but as a form of historical intervention. The next section builds on this insight to argue that hybridity itself constitutes an alternative historiographical practice, a decolonial mode of producing knowledge that resists the closure of imperial time and opens new pathways toward imagining the future.

5. Hybridity as Temporal and Epistemic Intervention

Across literature and cinema, the figure of the hybrid diasporic subject emerges not simply as a site of cultural negotiation but as a historical agent, one whose fractured positionality generates alternative modes of memory, narration, and time. As this chapter has shown through analyses of South Asian-British fiction, Maghrebi Francophone writing, and African diasporic cinema, hybridity is not reducible to multiculturalism or aesthetic eclecticism. It is a temporal and epistemic intervention, a mode of disrupting dominant historiographical frameworks and producing knowledge from the margins.

The postcolonial hybrid subject is forged through rupture: dislocated from linear genealogies, exiled from origins, and unmoored from teleological progress. Such a subject does not seek to restore a lost wholeness, but to dwell within fragmentation as a space of critical agency. In Homi Bhabha's terms, hybridity does not reconcile oppositions; rather, it "negotiates the incommensurable" and opens a Third Space where new meanings are enunciated outside binary structures (Bhabha 55). This negotiation is temporal as much as cultural. The hybrid subject inhabits multiple, overlapping, and often conflicting temporalities, ancestral, colonial, diasporic, and postcolonial, thereby interrupting the smooth temporal logic of modern historiography.

This interruption becomes especially evident in the genealogical discontinuities present in diasporic narratives. In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Karim's identity is not formed through lineage or bloodline but through improvisation, contradiction, and performance. Similarly, Sebbar's *Shérazade* and Ben Jelloun's *Leaving Tangier* foreground protagonists whose historical consciousness is marked by amnesia, misrecognition, and longing, rather than heritage or national memory. These figures embody what Paul Gilroy calls a "politics of transfiguration," in which new forms of subjectivity and historical understanding emerge from the residues of imperial violence and cultural hybridity (Gilroy 37).

Such fragmented genealogies produce counter-historical narratives that resist the archive of the state, the chronicle of empire, and the myth of national unity. As Saidiya Hartman has noted, diasporic storytelling often takes the form of "critical fabulation", a reimagining of the historical record that both mourns and transgresses the archive's silences (Hartman 11). In this sense, hybridity is not merely a symptom of displacement but a strategy of historical re-writing. It enables the articulation of stories that would otherwise remain illegible within dominant paradigms of historical knowledge.

This epistemic reorientation requires a move from historiography above to historiography below, from official records to embodied memory, from imperial timelines to personal and collective hauntings, from linear progress to recursive mourning. Dipesh Chakrabarty's call to "provincialize Europe" resonates powerfully here, as the hybrid diasporic subject writes against the grain of Western historical thought, asserting instead a multiplicity of temporalities that defy synchronization (Chakrabarty 71). In cinema, this is enacted through visual and narrative fragmentation, spectral motifs, and the deliberate suspension of narrative

closure. In literature, it emerges through multilingualism, intertextuality, and non-linear narration.

Moreover, hybridity demands a decolonial historiography, a praxis that not only critiques Eurocentric history but produces new frameworks rooted in the experiences, epistemologies, and cultural expressions of the formerly colonized. Walter Mignolo's concept of "border epistemology" captures this precisely: knowledge generated from the underside of modernity, from the zones where imperial reason fails and other modes of knowing emerge (Mignolo 86). Hybrid subjects, as border thinkers, reveal the constructedness of historical narratives, and by inhabiting the fissures of history, they refuse erasure while resisting assimilation.

In this light, hybridity is neither a passive consequence of diaspora nor a romanticized emblem of postmodern fluidity. It is a disruptive force, one that unsettles the linearity, purity, and teleology upon which dominant historiographies depend. It embodies a temporality of resistance, where memory is nonlinear, identity is performative, and history is a contested terrain. As Édouard Glissant reminds us, "To consent not to be a single being is to consent to the opacity of relation" (Glissant 190). In consenting to opacity, fragmentation, and rupture, the hybrid subject not only survives diaspora, it reclaims historical agency through aesthetic and epistemic innovation.

CONCLUSION

In tracing the trajectories of hybrid diasporic subjects across literature and cinema, this chapter has argued that diaspora is not merely a consequence of historical disruption but a generative force in rethinking the very grammar of history itself. By engaging with diasporic narratives from Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Leïla Sebbar's *Shérazade*, Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Leaving Tangier*, and the films of Mati Diop and Mahamat-Saleh Haroun, the study has illuminated how hybridity becomes a temporal and epistemic intervention, a site where fragmented memories, spectral inheritances, and border knowledge coalesce to challenge the authority of Eurocentric historiography.

At the core of this inquiry lies a critical response to the assumption that history must follow a linear, cohesive, and nation-bound trajectory. In contrast, the cultural productions examined here articulate diasporic histories as non-linear, recursive, and discontinuous, shaped by rupture rather than rootedness, improvisation rather than inheritance. These works do not

merely represent the diasporic condition; they reconfigure the historiographical landscape, foregrounding silenced voices, suppressed temporalities, and counter-archives born from dislocation.

Crucially, the hybrid subject does not seek to repair the fracture through a return to origins, nor through full assimilation into dominant paradigms. Instead, they inhabit the in-between as a space of creation. In doing so, they craft a historical consciousness that is both haunted by the past and open to the unpredictable promise of the future. Through irony, opacity, repetition, and dissonance, these narratives disrupt the teleological fantasies of empire and nation, offering instead a poetics of relation, to borrow Édouard Glissant's phrase, grounded in multiplicity and difference (Glissant 189–90).

This rethinking of history from the borderlands is not without its tensions. The hybridity it performs often risks being misread as depoliticized cosmopolitanism. But when understood as a mode of epistemic disobedience, as Walter Mignolo proposes, hybridity reclaims the archive from imperial institutions and repositions historical agency in the hands of those who have been displaced, silenced, or rendered illegible (Mignolo 85). In this sense, diaspora is not merely a wound but a resistant archive, one that gathers scattered fragments not to restore wholeness but to compose new configurations of meaning, memory, and futurity.

The future, for the diasporic subject, is not the culmination of a linear past but an open field of imaginative recomposition, a realm where ancestral hauntings, hybrid languages, and aesthetic interruptions converge to articulate possible worlds. As Saidiya Hartman reminds us, the work of storytelling in the wake of historical erasure is not to recover what was lost in its entirety, but to "imagine what cannot be verified, to reckon with the precarious lives which are visible only in the moment of their disappearance" (*Wayward Lives* 17). Diasporic cultural production thus becomes not only a political act of survival, but a creative act of world-making.

This chapter ultimately affirms that the postcolonial diaspora, far from being peripheral to modernity, stands at the center of a radical rethinking of history, identity, and memory. In literature and film, in language and image, the hybrid subject performs a historiographical labor that unsettles the past and writes toward a future unbound by imperial time. It is in the shattered mirror of diaspora that we catch a glimpse, not of resolution, but of possibility.

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CHAPTER 4

Rooted Yet Adrift: Namelessness in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Whereabouts*

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ABSTRACT

In postcolonial and postmodern fiction, the absence of a name is not an absence of identity but a refusal of fixity. Hence, namelessness often functions as a powerful tool to express fragmentation, alienation, and the resistance to imposed identities. *Dove Mi Trovo* or *Whereabouts* (2018), a novel written and self-translated from Italian by Jhumpa Lahiri, embodies the theme of namelessness by presenting nameless characters and places. This stylistic choice, often celebrated as Lahiri's literary shift, signals an identity crisis shaped by displacement, solitude, and a fractured sense of belonging. The protagonist, unmarked by cultural signifiers, namely a face, a name, and an identity,finds herself existing nowhere. The present paper argues that the namelessness of the protagonist in *Whereabouts* reflects a profound state of unhomeliness as theorized by Indian scholar Homi Bhabha. It also contends that the absence of names is intricately tied to the fluid, layered identity discussed in Lebanese-French author Amin Maalouf's *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong*. By refusing to anchor the protagonist within rigid identity categories, Lahiri intervenes in ongoing debates on identity politics challenging essentialist perceptions of identity and belonging.This study demonstrates that namelessness in *Whereabouts* operates both as an indicator of identity crisis and as a strategic mode of resistance to imposed identities. Through situating the novel

within the frameworks of postcolonial and identity theories, this paper highlights how *Whereabouts* uses namelessness to narrate the invisible yet persistent struggle to belong.

Keywords: Jhumpa Lahiri, *Whereabouts*, namelessness, identity crisis, identity politics, resistance, depersonalization, diasporic identities, unhomeliness, self-translation, postcolonial literature, Amin Maalouf, Homi Bhabha.

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary cultural and political landscape, identity is both a weapon and a wound. In his book *In The Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong* (1998), henceforth *In the Name of Identity*, Amin Maalouf argues that the clearest of concepts, identity included, is often the hardest to define. To Maalouf, "*Identity is one of those false friends*" (Maalouf 9). It is a deceptively familiar concept that "*we all think we know what the word means and go on trusting it, even when it's slyly starting to say the opposite.*"(9) In this research, I will be discussing not only identity bare and raw but the implications of identity politics, another thorny concept that adorns our modern world. Once a radical strategy of solidarity among marginalized groups, identity politics has become a defining feature of public discourse in the twenty-first century. Movements such as Black Lives Matter, Me Too, and decolonization campaigns in education, politics and literature have foregrounded identity as the primary axis of visibility, justice, and representation. Yet, while these movements challenge structural inequalities, they also intensify the pressure to name, define, and categorize the self. To declare one's race, gender, sexuality, nationality, and even trauma became a means of gaining legitimacy and recognition.

Against this backdrop, a substantial body of scholarly and public critique declares that identity politics often exacerbates social fragmentation (Us vs them), essentialism (fixed and homogenous identities), simplification (reducing intersections of identity), and weaponization of labels (labels weaponized to shut debate). In the heat of discourse surrounding identity politics, the impulse to reject categorization and representation is relatively uncommon. To this end, namelessness emerges as a literary counter-strategy to eliminate the I-state with an I-less counterpart. While naming often signals legibility and power, namelessness can signify resistance to reductive identity labels fumed by the political. On the other hand, it may also reflect a deeper crisis of identity especially for characters navigating dislocation, hybridity or postcolonial alienation. The tension between names and namelessness becomes a powerful

literary device through which writers engage with contemporary questions of identity, power, and representation.

This chapter explores how literature engages with identity politics by withholding names. Focusing on Jhumpa Lahiri's 2021 self-translated *Whereabouts*, a novel that offers a portrait of a woman who is unnamed, unanchored, and displaced, I argue that namelessness operates both as a tool of resistance and as an indicator of identity crisis and depersonalization. Through this lens, we can see namelessness as a subversive narrative device that disrupts dominant paradigms of recognition and opens space for a more fluid, universal, and critical understanding of the self. The absence of names, in this context, also signals a fractured sense of identity rendering characters socially invisible or insignificant.

Much has been written about Lahiri's exploration of diaspora and identity especially in her early novels and short stories. *The Namesake* (2003) the author's first novel, delves into the life of an immigrant Bengali family living in the US. Her collection of short stories, *Interpreter of Maladies (*1999), navigates the ebbs and flows of different slices of Bengali society ranging from immigrants to those who stayed behind. In a similar vein, *The Lowland* (2013) follows the lives of two brothers whose lives diverge in young adulthood. In an interview about places in *Whereabouts*, Lahiri reflects on how her earlier English works were deeply rooted in identity, names, and origins: "*My previous body of work - all of the work in English - was so deeply entrenched in names, places, what it meant to be from Calcutta but living in Boston*" (Kelly 2021). Nonetheless, her latest novel *Whereabouts*, takes a different direction. The novel was written in Italian as "*Dove me trovo*" translated to "*Where I find myself*," or "*Where I am*." Lahiri translated the novel herself and so *Whereabouts* got its fair share of scholarship as Lahiri's self-translated novel and literary shift. However, namelessness in the novel remains unauthorized. This chapter fills the gap by situating Lahiri's novel within the frameworks of postcolonial theory and identity theory showcasing how namelessness functions both as a vehicle for resisting identity essentialism and as a means of demonstrating depersonalization in an age of hyper-visibility.

In my endeavour to assess naming in opposition to namelessness in the present study, I attempt to answer the following research questions: First, how does Jhumpa Lahiri's *Whereabouts* use namelessness as a literary strategy to explore diasporic identity? Second, in what ways does namelessness reflect the condition of unhomeliness as theorized by Homi Bhabha? Moreover, how does the protagonist's namelessness challenge fixed conceptions of

identity? Last but not least, how does namelessness depict an identity crisis and a depersonalization in Lahiri's novel? Finally, to what extent does the absence of a name serve as a metaphor for the protagonist's fluid identity as discussed in Amin Maalouf's theory of layered identity?

This study draws on postcolonial theory and identity theory and applies an interpretive literary analysis to examine the literary and symbolic implications of namelessness in *Whereabouts*. In this inquiry, I argue that the absence of a name is both a resistance to imposed identities and an indication of identity crisis.This research adopts an interpretive literary analysis combining close reading of *Whereabouts* with selective comparative references to other literary works in which namelessness plays a central role. Literary works such as *Heart of Darkness*, *Season of Migration to the North*, *Frankenstein*, *Invisible Man*, and *The Road* are used as comparative touchpoints to illustrate how anonymity has been deployed across different historical and cultural contexts. These examples serve to situate *Whereabouts* within a broader literary and theoretical conversation about identity. The analysis is conducted through the lens of Homi Bhabha's concept of unhomeliness and Amin Maalouf's theory of layered identity enabling an examination of how namelessness can simultaneously signify agency and alienation.

In Bhabha's framework, unhomeliness draws on Sigmund Freud's notion of the uncanny to articulate how cultural displacement and identity crisis generate a haunting sensation of not belonging even within one's own home. In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha maintains, "*In that displacement the border between home and world becomes confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting*" (Bhabha 141). In other words, unhomeliness is a psychological condition in which familiar spaces feel alien or unsettling because the barrier between the public and the private is demolished. In this context, the protagonist's namelessness in *Whereabouts* can be read as a manifestation of "*the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world*" (Bhabha 141). The narrator is neither settled nor unsettled for she exists nowhere suspended between belonging and displacement.

This study, additionally, builds on Amin Maalouf's notion of layered identity in which he rejects monolithic definitions of identity in favor of a multifaceted understanding. According to Maalouf, identity is shaped by a combination of affiliations. Language, religion, geography, and history, among others, interact in complex and sometimes contradictory ways to form a

multifaceted sense of the self. To this end, the protagonist in *Whereabouts* resists being categorized. Her ambiguity echoes Maalouf's idea that one cannot be reduced to a single defining element.

Since its publication, *Whereabouts* has attracted a diverse range of scholarly interpretations that intersect around questions of identity, language, and belonging. In "The Pursuit of Lightness: Jhumpa Lahiri's Italophone Writing," Grazia Micheli addresses the reasons why Lahiri wrote in Italian. She suggests that Lahiri's choice originates from her desire of getting relief from her ethnic identity, a "*need to move beyond the two languages and cultures that have anchored her work and identity to the Bengali/American binary.*"(121) In this regard, Micheli observes that Lahiri's postnational approach offers a liberating perspective freeing literature and language from the constraints of nationality, culture, and fixed notions of identity. Micheli interprets this linguistic shift as a deliberate negotiation of authorship and cultural affiliation. She maintains:

> [i]n a world where people are increasingly crossing borders, and where it would be myopic to continue to keep literatures and language within closed national compartments, Lahiri endorses a sort of postnationalism that releases languages from any essential link to a particular culture or country and vice versa. (Micheli 124)

Susmita Talkudar's spatial reading extends this conversation by showing how *Whereabouts* narrator's solitary movements conveys an identity crisis tied to contemporary global mobility. Similarly, M.K. Ratha and I. Nayak's study of metacommunication in *Whereabouts* demonstrates how meaning emerges from silence, deepening the connection between literary minimalism and the narrator's emotional reserve. These perspectives reveal that language choice, spatial disconnection, and elements of metacommunication intertwine in *Whereabouts* shaping the protagonist's ambiguous identity. Building on these insights, my analysis turns to a related but underexplored element ,that is, the absence of personal names. I argue that namelessness reflects the unhomely condition of diasporic life. At the same time, it acts as a postcolonial strategy of resistance that challenges fixed cultural, national, and linguistic labels affirming instead a layered and fluid sense of the self.

1. Significance of Naming, Renaming and Namelessness

Names function as linguistic tools that allow individuals to be recognized, addressed, and remembered within a specific cultural, social and historical contexts. John Stuart Mill acknowledges this referential function: "*there is a name for every person, and for every remarkable place.*" (33). Beyond their practical utility, names serve as personal, cultural, and political markers often encapsulating one's heritage, beliefs, and affiliations. They carry with them the weight of individual histories and collective narratives situating people within particular communities or traditions:"*I have a name, therefore I am.*" In this section, I will explore the literary significance of naming, renaming, and namelessness focusing on how names in literature illuminate broader questions of belonging and identity.This leads to a critical question: What happens when names are changed, imposed, or erased?

1.1. From Recognition to Reconfiguration: Renaming and the Question of Selfhood

Renaming characters often addresses themes of identity, power, and authority. In postcolonial and diasporic literatures, renaming demonstrates either resistance or assimilation. Authors use this device to examine how names can be tools of control or empowerment and how altering names can reshape characters' relationship to identity. At length, renaming invites readers to question the stability of identity and the authority behind naming.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's short story "The Arrangers of Marriage," from *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009), uses renaming to address cultural dislocation, power dynamics, and identity erasure. The protagonist, Chinaza, is forced by her new husband, self-named Dave, to adopt the American name Agatha Bell upon moving to the United States. Her husband, obsessed with imitating American ways, dismisses her Igbo name and insists on a name that will allow her to be "*as mainstream as possible*" (Adichie 173). This renaming is not an adjustment but an act of cultural suppression. Similarly, in Yasmina Khadra's *What the Day Owes the Night*, (2008) the protagonist is given another name, a necessary step to blend in French society. Younes was renamed Jonas by his uncle's French wife. He refused this name at the beginning and reminded her that his name was Younes, however, "—*[she] gave [him] a tender smile, stroked [his] cheek and whispered: not any more my darling.*" (Khadra 41)

In a similar vein, in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), Jean Rhys exposes how the name Bertha was forced on Antoinette by her English husband Rochester, a deliberate act of domination that strips her of her Caribbean identity and imposes an alien one. The name Bertha becomes a symbol of colonial rewriting where Rochester erases Antoinette's past, culture, and autonomy.In contrast, the nameless narrator in *Whereabouts* appears to resist names altogether, perhaps as a preemptive defense against the possibility of being renamed and labeled, thereby avoiding the erasure and control that naming can impose. If renaming is a way of redefining, what are the implications of the absence of names in the first place, the absence of a tent's pegs?

1.2. To Name or not to Name, that is the Question

Benedicta Windt-Val accentuates the magnitude of names as makers of identity in her article titled, "Personal Names and Identity in Literary Contexts." (2012) She asserts that names are essential instruments to craft believable characters "*that gives the impression of being authentic.*"(278) However, in postmodern and postcolonial fiction, names are absent from literary scenes in many works. In "Anonymity and artistic effects: A Study of Nameless Characters in Selected Middle East Novels,"(2025) Sarada Kumar examines nameless characters in novels like *Season of Migration to the North* by Tayeb Salih and *Chronicle of a Last Summer* by Yasmine El Rashidi. Kumar showcases how namelessness strips preconceived notions of race and identity, highlights universal human experience, and subverts traditional narrative conventions.

When authors reserve names, they remove the immediate associations and assumptions that come with them. This choice invites readers to engage with the characters based solely on their behavior, emotions, and relationships. Without the filter of a name, readers are prompted to see the characters more clearly and personally forming connections rooted in shared humanity rather than social, racial or cultural labels. Hence, nameless characters transcend individual identity and become vessels for universal ideas. In this subsection, drawing on examples from prominent literary works, I will explore how namelessness symbolizes fragmented identity and the lingering effects of colonialism, while also embodying archetypes and shared universal experiences. I will also assess how namelessness functions as a subversive narrative device in face of literary conventions.

In Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), the framed narrator remains anonymous throughout which contributes to the story's layered and ambiguous tone; his namelessness also

serves as a colonial critique exposing those who passively consume imperial narratives. Correspondingly, in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1966), the unnamed narrator returns to Sudan from England to find himself deeply unsettled by the legacy of colonialism. In both works, the narrators' anonymity reflects a profound sense of internal dislocation with their narrative vagueness serving as a metaphor for the psychological and cultural fractures wrought by the empire. Lahiri's *Whereabouts* extends this tradition by presenting a protagonist who is devoid of conventional identity markers. This narrative strategy mirrors the alienation found in Conrad's and Salih's narrators and reconfigures it within the diasporic and postmodern context.

The protagonist's namelessness in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), underlines his social invisibility as a Black man in America. He becomes a symbol of the marginalization and erasure of Black identity representing a broader collective experience rather than a single life. Likewise, in *The Road* (2006), McCarthy uses namelessness to depict a world stripped of identity and structure. The characters, known as *the man* and *the boy*, represent universal figures rather than specific individuals in the face of disaster. Similarly, the absence of personal names in *Whereabouts* detaches the protagonist from fixed identity markers allowing her to embody the fluid, unsettled nature of diasporic existence. While Ellison speaks to the systemic erasure of a racial identity and McCarthy to the reduction of identity in the face of societal collapse, Lahiri engages with the quiet erasure of the self through depersonalization and solitude expanding the ways anonymity can interrogate identity.

In addition to this, namelessness is a bold break from literary convention. In a tradition where names serve as anchors of identity, namelessness resists easy categorization. It disrupts readers' expectations pushing them to ponder how identity is constructed and how much we rely on names to assign meaning. In José Saramago's *Blindness* (1995), the characters are referred to by their roles and distinguishing physical characteristics, namely, "the doctor," "the girl with dark glasses," "the old man with the eye patch." Jhumpa Lahiri employs a similar strategy in *Whereabouts* where secondary characters are identified through relational or functional labels such as my friend, my colleague, the barista, and the history professor. This technique flattens social hierarchies and forces readers to grapple with the raw conditions of humanity when identity markers are stripped away.

On the other hand, concealing a character's name can signify their lack of importance. A name is a core marker of identity; people define themselves through their names and others

use these names to acknowledge and relate to them (Ephratt 11). The monster's namelessness in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), for example, illustrates a form of identity erasure. While a name would affirm the monster's existence and individuality, its absence renders him a spectral figure defined only by others' fear and rejection. This omission dehumanizes the creature and severs his ability to construct a stable identity. The monster's namelessness in *Frankenstein* offers a parallel case of identity erasure, serving as a comparative touchpoint to highlight how anonymity operates in *Whereabouts*' postmodern and postcolonial context. The monster and Lahiri's narrator share a profound solitude; both are isolated figures whose namelessness mirrors their emotional and social alienation. In each case, the creators, Victor Frankenstein and Lahiri, fail to name their creation. This choice reinforces marginalization and highlights the power dynamics of naming, where withholding names serves as forms of control, erasure, and enforced otherness.

Having established the theoretical framework surrounding naming and anonymity, I now turn to Lahiri's *Whereabouts* to examine how previously defined ideas operate in context. In the following section, I aim to analyze how the abstract theories of identity crisis, unhomeliness, depersonalization, resistance and layered identity intersect in the lived experience of the anonymous protagonist. The narrator embodies a paradox of being both settled and unsettled, a condition that accentuates her sense of unhomeliness. This unhomeliness, I argue, emerges as the inevitable consequence of the persistent urge to categorize, label, and name. Lahiri , thus, transforms namelessness into a narrative strategy that resists labels; however, in doing so, she creates an isolated figure that seems to manifest unhomeliness and demonstrate absence.

2. Rooted Yet Adrift: Namelessness in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Whereabouts*

In *Whereabouts*, Lahiri constructs a nuanced portrayal of rootedness and unrootedness through the unnamed narrator's relationship with the environment and people around her. While the protagonist inhabits a familiar "*urban cocoon*," (Lahiri 85) marked by habitual routines and local interactions, her interior world is defined by emotional detachment and dislocation. The anonymity of the narrator reinforces a sense of placelessness that undermines the stability of her physical surroundings. Lahiri thus reveals how spatial familiarity does not necessarily translate into a sense of belonging illustrating the tension between external rootedness and internal drifting. In the present section, I will examine how unhomeliness and namelessness intersect in the novel, how layered identity illuminates the narrator's unsettled condition, and

how resisting names functions both as a strategy of defiance against categorization and as a potential marker of depersonalization. I will also explore how Lahiri's nameless narrator operates as a symbolic figure of transnationalism where the absence of a fixed name opens space for more fluid and transnational readings of identity.

2.1. Cosmopolitan Characters: Namelessness and the Global

In an age marked by migration, digital disembodiment, and global precarity, the absence of names in literary works advances a universality and a commonness. In one of her interviews, Lahiri contemplates the omission of place names in *Whereabouts* suggesting that such erasure creates a sense of openness and liberation. She critiques the excessive attachement to fixed identities and origins arguing that the implications of the latter often contribute to division and conflict. This view resonates with Amin Maalouf's argument in *In the Name of Identity*, where he asserts that rigid conceptions of identity often become a driving force behind exclusion and violence. Lahiri's perspective reveals a cosmopolitan sensibility in thinking and an aspiration toward a more fluid and inclusive understanding of self and belonging.

> ...if we take away the names of the places, the name of the city, it's more
> open. I find it more liberating. I think that identity can be a trap at times. I
> think we can become too fixated on who we are and where we're from.
> And I think this can actually- and do lead to a lot of very grave problems
> in the world and for our society and for the way we communicate and exist
> and coexist. (Kelly 2021)

In a chapter titled "In the Piazza," Lahiri advances a positive example of a universal character. The narrator meets a young woman who is the daughter of an immigrant family. The young woman, simply referred to as Friends' Daughter "*doesn't look like a tourist or foreigner*" and is "*fluent in the language her parents struggle to speak*" (Lahiri 10). The young woman being "*the type that fits in anywhere,*" (10) stirs envy and admiration in the narrator's heart. Her ability to move across cultures without difficulty challenges traditional norms and fixed categories of belonging. Through this character, Lahiri imagines a world where identity is fluid and not limited by birthplace, language or culture. The narrator expresses admiration while parents express concern wishing their daughter would attend a university closer to 'home.' However, the daughter, "*full of dreams and plans,*" (10) resists and is willing to defy authority and shape her own future.

> She believes it's still possible to change the world. She's already brave enough to stand up to authority and she's determined to make a life for herself here. I'm fond of this girl, her grit inspires me. At the same time I think about myself back then and feel depressed.(Lahiri 10)

Lahiri draws a contrast between the older generation, represented by the parents who are cautious and rooted in traditional notions of home and identity, and the younger generation, embodied by their daughter, who embraces fluidity, independence, and a global sense of identity. The young woman symbolizes a hopeful future in which identity is no longer defined by language or cultural boundaries. By introducing unnamed, universal characters who embody a transnational context, Lahiri shifts her focus from individual identity to shared human experiences offering a renewed perspective that moves beyond the constraints of national or cultural affiliation.

2.2. *'Lacking Titles, Lacking Meaning'*: Analyzing Namelessness in *Whereabouts*

The absence of names of characters, places, and conventional narrative markers in *Whereabouts* demonstrates concerns with identity and belonging. Lahiri's unanchored narrator presents a new type of human predicament as people are meshed between the cultural and linguistic fixedness of identity and the fluidity of space in the global age of mass movement (Talukdar 68). Lahiri's novel unfolds as a series of interior monologues narrated by a woman whose name, face, and origin are carefully withheld. Writing the novel, Lahiri maintained, "*I didn't think to myself coherently, oh, I'm going to not write this character's name. I just didn't write her name. She was just a - she*" (Kelly 2021). The narrator in *Whereabouts* quietly observes people and events around her, "*pay[ing] attention to people [she] barely know[s]*" (Lahiri 58). We know very little about her apart from the fact that she is a single middle-aged professor whose life is marked by an overwhelming solitude.She knows many people, known to readers as friends, ex-lovers, acquaintances and colleagues, but few know about her solitude and mental health problems. We know she has been in many affairs but none worked for her to settle down and build a family. We also know that her mother is alive while her father has long passed away.

The narrator's namelessness mirrors her profound detachment from others and from herself. She lives alone separated from her remaining family and maintains a small circle of friends. At the same time, she is inwardly estranged; she feels unsettled, peripheral, and weighed down by an immense solitude that deprives her life of clear direction or meaning. The anonymity extends beyond the narrator to the novel's secondary characters: my friend, my friend's husband, my colleague, the barista, to mention but a few. Chapters are also titled after nameless locations she frequents, for instance: the trattoria, the piazza, the waiting room, and the museum.The author's sparse naming conventions flatten social relationships and contribute to a narrative of disconnection and solitude; this is further intensified by the ambiguity of place which reinforces the protagonist's emotional and spatial dislocation.

Devoid of identity markers, the narrator emerges as a blurred figure moving through unnamed spaces.Claude Monet's *The Boulevard of the Capuchins* (1873-1874) depicts the condition of *Whereabout*'s narrator's movement "*in a vast city, alone, disoriented all the while*"(Lahiri 20). The painting captures a Parisian street bustling with movement, yet the figures are reduced to soft, indistinct shapes whose forms dissolve into the haze of the city. This visual blurring mirrors the existential and emotional state of the narrator who moves through the city like a shadow. Just like Monet's painting captures people in transit with no clear destination or distinguishing features, Lahiri's narrator walks through life in a kind of observational drift. Her professor job requires a presence and an agency, nevertheless, she sees it as nothing more than an obligation, "*we're forced to inhabit close quarters, we're told to be accessible, and yet I feel peripheral,*" she admits (Lahiri 4). The narrator, like the people in the painting, is ephemeral. She is part of the crowd but detached from it. This structure mirrors the diasporic condition in which one exists within a society yet remains fundamentally apart from it, a condition postcolonial theory often describes as unhomely.

2.3. Namelessness as a Metaphor of Unhomeliness

The absence of identity constructs in *Whereabouts* denote the unsettling condition of unhomeliness. Hence, throughout the story, we witness the narrator's constant movement encapsulating her psychological and spatial dislocation. Lahiri's narrator embodies unhomeliness through her transient existence oscillating between familiar and unfamiliar spaces without forming enduring attachments. Her anonymity articulates her status as a subject in a limbo unclaimed neither by place nor identity. The narrator "*always coming and going*"(Lahiri 4), is unable to settle down anywhere. In this section, I explore unhomeliness in

the novel from two perspectives: first, through the narrator's relationship with place and self, and second, through Lahiri's literary minimalism. By examining tone, rhythm, and narrative, I attempt to show how minimalism becomes a stylistic marker of unhomeliness.

Unhomeliness in *Whereabouts* manifests in the narrator's estranged relationship with herself and her surroundings. The narrator's reflections often reveal a persistent sense of dislocation even in a city she never left: "*I've never left this city*," she admits (Lahiri 99). However, this fixedness does not grant her a sense of home nor stability. Rather, her life is marked by ceaseless movement,"*I've never stayed still, I've always been moving, that's all I've ever been doing. Always waiting, either to get somewhere or to come back. Or to escape. I keep packing and unpacking the small suitcase at my feet*"(99). This unsettled rhythm defines her daily existence and embodies the psychic unease of the unhomely. The narrator keeps moving and most chapters are titled after places she visits, that is: "On the Street," "At the Coffee Bar," "At the Villa," "In the Country." Some chapters have identical titles which demonstrates she visits some places more than once. By and large, constant movement undermines stability and disrupts any enduring sense of belonging.This condition of being nowhere although people are always somewhere stresses the experiences of people in the twenty-first century. Movement generates alienation as individuals are caught between the need to assimilate and the desire to resist. This dilemma of choosing between here or there creates a persistent tension (Westphal qtd. in Talukdar 71).

Moreover, the narrator's experiences in places that are important to her depicts an estrangement. In the chapter titled "At the Museum", a site she visits often, she observes houses from a long time ago,"*houses from antiquity. They were excavated, pried from their surroundings, removed, relocated, displayed to the public*"(Lahiri 19). Her reflection on these displaced houses underscores her preoccupation with removal not only as a historical process but as a personal condition. Like the excavated dwellings, the narrator is uprooted from stable spaces and severed from intimate bonds.This parallel reveals how displacement becomes both an external reality and an inward state of being.

In the museum, the narrator observes the behaviour of a woman that looks like a foreigner, "*thinking of her house in some other part of the world…missing that ordinary dwelling*" (Lahiri 20). The woman, unaware of the narrator's presence, sleeps on one of the benches and that is how according to the narrator, "*she manages to fully inhabit and possess this room, crossing a certain threshold I've always respected*"(20). The narrator sees in the

woman a familiar condition: someone who does not belong to the place she inhabits, someone who carries with her the absence of home. The woman crosses a threshold the narrator has never dared to cross. This threshold can be understood both literally, claiming space in a public room, and metaphorically marking the boundary between belonging and alienation.The narrator expresses an admiration tinged with envy towards her. The woman's presence reveals to her that even in the absence of a fixed home, one can still assert agency, take up space, and exist meaningfully, something the narrator could never achieve.

Literary minimalism emphasizes precision and brevity. It often works by inviting the reader's imagination to fill in what the text withholds. *Whereabouts*' simple plot, short declarative sentences and lack of context points out an economy with words and a tone of restraint and estrangement. The first-person narrative structure reinforces this mood: the narrator's voice is subdued, reflective, and detached suggesting a speaker caught between intimacy and alienation. Rhythm follows this fragmented quality. Short, meditative passages unfold with pauses and silences that resemble journal entries. Lahiri also practices minimalism in naming, a stylistic choice that reflects both her narrative economy and thematic concerns. Characters are referred to through vague, functional labels. Lahiri's linguistic minimalism, sparse diction, and economy of description, creates both clarity and absence suggesting that what is not said is as important as what is being said.

3. '*More than the Sum of its Parts*': Namelessness as a Tool of Resistance

> A painting is more than the sum of its parts,' he would tell me, and then go on to explain how the cow by itself is just a cow, and the meadow by itself is just grass and flowers, and the sun peeking through the trees is just a beam of light, but put them all together and you've got magic. Wendelin Van Draanen (34)

In his book *In the Name of Identity*, Maalouf advances a question he often encounters: whether he felt more French or Lebanese? He answers,"*Would I exist more authentically if I cut off a part of myself* ?" (Maalouf 1) Our modern world is shaped by identity politics where individuals cling to a singular aspect of their identity such as skin color, language, or cultural heritage in order to assert belonging or distinctiveness. Rather than reducing the self to one dominant allegiance, as it is commonly the case in polarized socio-political discourses, Maalouf suggests that we must acknowledge the multifaceted nature of human identity. In this vein, he

contends, "*identity can't be compartmentalised. You can't divide it up into halves or thirds or any other separate segments*" (Maalouf 2). That is, identity is the sum of various elements shaped by personal experiences, historical context, and cultural intersections. A person's identity, like Maalouf puts it, "*is like a pattern drawn on a tightly stretched parchment.*" Hence, it cannot be confined to a single affiliation without distorting its complexity and uniqueness. Maalouf critiques the essentialist view of identity that reduces individuals to a single, unchanging affiliation ignoring the dynamic and evolving aspects of personal experience, choice, and cultural development.

> [*Single affiliation*] seems to reflect a view of humanity which, though it is widespread, is also in my opinion dangerous. It presupposes that "deep down inside" everyone there is just one affiliation that really matters, a kind of "fundamental truth" about each individual, an "essence" determined once and for all at birth, never to change thereafter. As if the rest; all the rest a person's whole journey through time as a free agent; the beliefs he acquires in the course of that journey; his own individual tastes, sensibilities and affinities; *in short his life itself counted for nothing*. (*My Italics*) (Maalouf 2)

Individual identity is a dynamic whole constituted by multiple and sometimes contradictory components. In this light, embracing the plurality within our identities becomes a means of self-understanding and a form of resistance against essentialist narratives. In *Whereabouts*, the narrator's namelessness functions as an act of resistance against labeling and fixed identities. This aligns with what Édouard Glissant calls the "right to opacity"; in other words, the right to remain unfixed and unreadable on dominant terms. Lahiri's narrative strategy therefore unsettles the expectations placed on postcolonial and diasporic authors to name their characters, to locate them in history and culture, to give them an identity legible to a Western literary market.

Moreover, Ephratt notes that namelessness also functions as a site of meaning and presence: "*contrary to what we might suspect, the no name does not conceal. Instead, it communicates rich and varied meanings, some genuinely reflected by the no-name rather than by the anticipated given name*"(1). The statement suggests that namelessness does not limit depth and meaning but expands it, conveying more than what a given name could convey.Therefore, namelessness becomes a form of protection, autonomy, and presence. It allows the narrator to escape the expectations that come with social or cultural labeling. Instead of being defined by

others, she lives and observes on her own terms, making room for ambiguity, hesitation, and change. Through this erasure, Lahiri crafts a protagonist whose undefined-self resists the pressures of identification and in doing so it challenges the politics of belonging and exclusion.

4. A Road Not Taken: Namelessness as Depersonalization

In *Whereabouts*, namelessness dramatizes a condition of depersonalization that often characterizes diasporic and postcolonial identities. *Whereabouts* images this condition through its detached narrator whose solitude and identity fragmentation persist despite outward connectivity and movement (Talukdar 68). Namelessness, thus, emerges as a systematic erasure of individual identity, a site for void, and an indication of an existence that is peripheral. By withholding names, Lahiri symbolically erases the stability of her narrator which makes her an absent presence within the social sphere. To this end, namelessness demonstrates a void that reflects the narrator's profound isolation as her daily encounters remain superficial and lack the depth of meaningful connection. When she meets her married friend, someone who she might have had an affair with, she describes herself as "*A road not taken, a hypothetical affair,*" (Lahiri 55) which mirrors her condition as an unacknowledged or peripheral subject, who is present but remains unseen and unthought of. *Whereabouts* presents namelessness and depersonalization as twin effects of unhomeliness. The narrator is stripped of her name because her social identity is perpetually deferred, and she speaks in a depersonalized voice because her inner world cannot be reconciled with her outer environment.

CONCLUSION

Namelessness is a potent literary strategy that confronts the essentialist tendencies of identity politics in the contemporary world. Through withholding names of characters, and surroundings, *Whereabouts* resists the compulsion to fix, define, and locate the self within rigid cultural, national, or linguistic categories. Lahiri, in this sense, offers us a vision of subjectivity that is liminal, fluid, and unanchored. This erasure of identity markers generates space for a deeper reflection on what it means to exist in a world where belonging is growing uncertain. Drawing on Homi Bhabha's concept of unhomeliness and Amin Maalouf's theory of layered identity, I argued that namelessness in *Whereabouts* functions as a metaphor for unhomeliness, as a sign of identity crisis and as a narrative strategy of resistance against imposed and reductive notions of identity.

In this researcch , we addressed central questions on how namelessness operates as a literary strategy to explore an identity that is peripheral. In the process, we demonstrated how namelessness and depersonalization work as twin effects of unhomeliness. We also presented how namelessness in *Whereabouts* managed to destabilize fixed conceptions of identity in favour of a layered one. We also presented how Lahiri manages to reconfigure the parameters of diasporic literature through her postnational and cosmopolitan model of identity that privileges ambiguity over assertion, silence over self-declaration, and introspection over performance. Ultimately, *Whereabouts* invites us to rethink the politics of visibility and recognition in literature. No-names in Lahiri's novel offers a quiet but radical challenge to the dominant paradigms of representation. Namelessness becomes a site where the personal and the political intersect, where erasure becomes expression, and where the self finds a voice beyond the confines of label.

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CHAPTER 5

Memory, Voice, and Diasporic Identity in Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah"*

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ABSTRACT

Memory and Diasporic identity have always been at the heart of complex cultural exchanges and transnational connections, crucial elements in the formation of identity across borders. In the times of globalization, both are being deeply revisited, thus questioning the uniqueness and unity of identities and belongings. The present division draws on a qualitative, comparative kind of research to explore the multiple ways in which Diasporic identities contribute to the turning of receiving countries into multicultural and multi-ethnic spaces. Grounded in *The Dew Breaker* by Edwidge Danticat and *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, this work examines the narrative techniques and the way memory is used as tools of (self) representation within Haitian and Nigerian Diasporas. This paper positions storytelling as a counter-archive of representation which produces strategies of coping with the situation and sense of national pride that people develop while in Diasporas by examining the intersections between race, gender, culture, and dislocation. By a close textual analysis, this sect demonstrates that memory functions as a capacity both to deal with the past trauma people have been through and to respond to the contemporary intercultural reality in plural (multi)nation spaces. To sum up, the current chapter contends that the reframing of memory through diasporic literature is indispensable to our understanding of the transnational and transcultural dimensions of this

recent literary output which relate to the way contemporary literature is shifting the terms of identity, belonging, and cultural continuity.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines manners by which diasporic literature grapples with the interconnected matters of memory, identity, and home through the selected writs of Edwidge Danticat and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Despite the notion that both writers come from rather different cultural and historical contexts of Haitian exile and Nigerian migration, they both question how displacement shapes the self and how stories carry the burdens of belonging and its possibilities. Their novels (the ones under study precisely) lend themselves to thinking about how diasporic voices reclaim silenced histories, create hybrid identities, and redefine homecoming.

The part at disposal is guided primarily by the hypothesis that diaspora cannot only be construed as a condition of loss and disconnection, but can also be apprehended as a generative way of being, in which memory operates, simultaneously, as trauma and survival, identity as rupture and reinvention, and home as estrangement and longing. Reading Danticat's *The Dew Breaker* and *Breath, Eyes, Memory* in conversation with Adichie's *Americanah,* this chapter asks: How do these texts articulate the ethics of memory in relation to violence, exile, and racialization? How is identity navigated across borders, shaped by gender, and complicated by hybridity? And what does "return" mean for protagonists who experience homes that are never the same as the home they left?

The argument put forth in this article is that both authors push us toward recognizing diasporas as "partial belonging", as a condition where the impossibility of complete rootedness does not constitute failure, but opens a new form of relational existence. At the end of this comparative investigation will likely be the realization that Danticat and Adichie both not only document diasporic dislocations, but they also theorize them. This offers, in the context a literary poetics of in-betweeness. The selected texts indicate that memory, identity, and home are not stable endpoints but active processes in which the diasporic subject resists erasure and redefines belonging in the context of globalization.

1. Ethics of Memory: Silence vs. Voice

In diasporic literature, the question of memory is never simply a private practice of remembering, but rather seriously ethical activities in how communities deal with trauma, dislocation, and identity. In Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker* (2004) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), memory functions both as silence and a voice embodying tensions between the unbearable past and the pressing need to articulate it. These two texts stage what Paul Ricoeur calls "the duty of memory" with "the wounds of forgetting," demonstrating that remembering and forgetting are not just exercises of the intellect, but convey moral, ethical, political, and interpersonal risks. Danticat images a group of Haitians with memories of the "dew breaker" – who is defined and introduced as a torturer in Duvalier's regime - and the impossibility of silence in the face of the atrocity.

Adichie places memory as a crucial component of the diasporic discussion and claim of race, identity, and belonging. In the process, one must take for granted the recognizing that narrating or withholding one's story becomes a mode of survival in transnational conditions. In concert, these novels pose the ethical questions of memory: who is entitled to speak, what voices remain silenced, and how silence itself can be complicit, protective, or even subversive?

1.1. Memory as an Ethical Burden

Memory in diasporic texts presents itself as an inheritance and a responsibility. In this avenue, Marianne Hirsch's notion of "post-memory" is helpful to consider: it is a generational transmission of trauma in which the descendants of survivors experience the repercussions of certain events that they did not live through but nevertheless compose the framework of their identities by means of mediated recollection (Hirsch 22). This is illustrated in *The Dew Breaker*, Danticat's narrator (Ka) is the daughter of the former torturer. The past of her father looms over her identity in the unknown. "My father was the hunter. He was the killer. He was the torturer. He was the one who hurt people. And I never knew" (Danticat 5).

Her inheritance is as much narrative as it is genetic; she is fragmented in her selfhood by the silence of her father's legacy. There is the ethical quandary of labor: should she maintain the silence that sustains their tenuous familial relationship, or should she bring a truth into the world that may ruin it?

For Ricoeur, memory is always caught between two poles: the demand for fidelity to the truth and the impossibility of complete transparency. Ka's predicament illustrates the tension. The silence of her father prevents her from confronting unbearable knowledge, but it also binds her to his concealment. In this case, the ethics of memory unfold in a murky space where silence may hold the meaning of complicity as well as survival and love, instead of the existing plain binaries of remembrance versus forgetfulness,

Likewise, in *Americanah*, Ifemelu's path as a Nigerian immigrant in the United States unveils the ethical issues of memory in diasporic identity. As Ifemelu creates a successful career as a blogger (and that would be by commenting upon race in America), she distinguishes herself from Nigeria. A voice that does not have the constraints of geography flourishes, but it remains fractured by the haunting silences around her homeland. In the work she observes, "She had, with her blog, become her fullest self. But her memories of Nigeria - of Obinze, her mother's Christianity, her father's humiliation when he lost his job - were all things she wrote about sparsely, almost protectively" (Adichie 356). Ifemelu's selectiveness of narration highlights the ethics of diasporic voice; some memories need to be articulated in order to create alliances across racial landscapes, while other memories refuse to be commodified or translatable in the discursive space of her host country.

1.2. Silence as Trauma and Complicity

Silence in these works functions not simply as absence but as presence (a spectral reminder of trauma). In Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*, silence surrounds the father's atrocities. He tells Ka, "I was never a prisoner. I was the one who hurt prisoners" (Danticat 20). His confession is paradoxical: it is both a break in silence and an imposition of silence, since it forecloses dialogue by positioning Ka as custodian of a terrible secret. This dynamic aligns with Cathy Caruth's theorization of trauma as "the confrontation with an event that…is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known" (Caruth 4). The father's silence is not merely protective; it is symptomatic of trauma's unspeakability and its repetition across relationships.

But silence here also raises ethical questions of complicity. Should Ka, by keeping her father's secret, shield him from accountability? Silence, in this context, is ethically fraught, preserving intimacy while enabling historical amnesia. As Aleida Assmann argues, "the ethics of memory requires that silence be broken, lest forgetting serve as a second victimization"

(Assmann 92). Danticat forces readers to wrestle with whether silence can ever be ethically justified in the aftermath of atrocity.

In *Americanah*, silence also carries a burden of complicity but in different terms. Ifemelu's silence about her struggles in America—her brief period of sex work to pay tuition, for example—marks a refusal to narrativize shame within diasporic success stories. "She told nobody… She erased it, like a deleted email, refusing to think about it" (Adichie 192). Her silence here is protective, a way to reconstruct her dignity. Yet, when silence hides systemic violence—racism, gendered exploitation—it risks perpetuating injustice. Adichie thereby interrogates how silence can simultaneously shield the individual and obscure collective realities.

1.3. Voice as Testimony and Agency

Against silence, both Danticat and Adichie valorize voice as an ethical act of testimony. From Danticat's viewpoint, fragmented storytelling is rendered a certain form of collective witness. The novel that is polyphonically structured (simply signifying that each chapter was told from a different perspective) creates a chorus of voices that resists the silencing imposed by authoritarian violence. As an example, Beatrice, who is one of the torturer's victims, recalls: "He was there. He burned my brother's skin with cigarettes. And yet people tell me he is a good neighbor now. How can silence not kill me?" (Danticat 83). Beatrice's testimony exposes how diasporic communities negotiate survival by silencing past horrors, but her voice pierces through this repression, reclaiming agency.

Here, Danticat asserts with Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub that testimony transforms trauma into communicable history: "To testify is to implicate oneself in the narrative of the other, to share responsibility for truth" (Felman and Laub 5). By foregrounding victim voices, *The Dew Breaker* insists that the ethics of memory requires not only the articulation of trauma but also its acknowledgment by the community.

The blog belonging to Ifemelu in Americanah serves as a mighty metaphor for the utilization of voice as testimony. Through different posts, such as "Understanding America for the Non-American Black", personal experience is radically transformed into what is regarded as public discourse, narrativizing the racial realities of African immigrants in the United States. She writes: "Dear Non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I'm not black. America doesn't care" (Adichie 273).

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These posts enact what bell hooks terms "talking back," the transformation of speech from passive acceptance into "a site of resistance" (hooks 9). Ifemelu's voice disrupts silences imposed by American racial structures, creating spaces of recognition for others.

However, Adichie complicates this valorization of voice by highlighting its commodification. Ifemelu's voice becomes celebrated in American liberal circles, yet she feels alienated from her own truth. As she confesses: "I was saying what they wanted to hear, but I was not saying what I really wanted to say" (Adichie 379). Voice, then, is not simply libratory; it risks becoming another form of silence, constrained by external expectations. The ethics of memory thus entails not only speaking but speaking authentically, refusing the seductions of performative articulation.

1.4. Memory, Diaspora, and Exile

Both novels situate silence and voice within the diasporic condition, where memory is inextricable from exile and displacement. Edward Said's words that exile produces a "contrapuntal consciousness," force the individual to inhabit multiple worlds and voices simultaneously (Said 186). Danticat's characters embody this tension: Haitian immigrants in New York carry memories of dictatorship while navigating new diasporic silences. For instance, the barber Michel withholds his father's history of disappearance: "I don't talk about it here. It's not something Americans understand" (Danticat 103). Silence becomes a diasporic strategy, preserving dignity in contexts of incomprehension. Yet, the ethical stakes remain: by silencing atrocity for assimilation, does one betray the collective memory of the homeland?

Ifemelu's diasporic memory operates differently. Her silence about Nigeria in America is not simply repression but a response to the demand for simplification in transnational spaces. As she notes, "In America, you don't tell stories of home. People want to hear only the story of your suffering" (Adichie 226). The ethical challenge here lies in resisting reductive narratives: silence can resist exoticization as much as it can obscure truth. Adichie thus foregrounds the complexity of diasporic voice—when to speak, when to withhold—as central to the ethics of memory.

1.5. Silence and Voice's Ethics

The novels at disposal draw lines for convergences and divergences in how silence and voice function ethically. In Danticat, silence is directly connected to trauma, guilt, and

complicity, demanding to be broken for justice to prevail. In Adichie, silence emerges less from trauma than from negotiation within "racialized structures" of diaspora; breaking silence is not always liberating, since voice can be co-opted. Both writs, however, insist on the irreducible difficulty of memory's ethics: the moral obligation to remember coexists with the recognition that not all memories can or should be spoken.

As Gayatri Spivak famously asked, "Can the subaltern speak?" (Spivak 104). Danticat and Adichie complicate this question: the issue is not simply whether the marginalized can speak but under what conditions, to whom, and with what ethical consequences. In *The Dew Breaker*, victims struggle to speak across silences imposed by exile and denial; in *Americanah*, the diasporic subject negotiates when speech becomes resistance and when it becomes performance. Both texts suggest that silence and voice are not opposites but interdependent modes of ethical memory.

1.6. Remembering Otherwise

Inevitably, both *The Dew Breaker* and *Americanah* challenge researchers and readers to rethink the ultimate ethics of memory not as a binary choice between silence and voice but as an continuum of negotiation shaped by trauma, diaspora, and power altogether. For Danticat on one hand, breaking silence is crucial for justice, yet fraught with personal and communal risk. For Adichie on the other hand, offering memory in diaspora a voice grants agency but also risks commodification. Together, they unveil the idea that the ethics of memory is less about denoting when to speak or remain silent than about allowing attentiveness to the stakes of either choice.

As Ricoeur puts it, memory demands loyalty not only to the past but to the ethical responsibility it forces on the present (Ricoeur 122). Both works bear ultimate witness to this kind of responsibility. In this matter they are both insisting that diasporic literature must grapple with memory's silences and voices as components of identity, justice, and survival. In dramatizing the fragile, often painful balance between recalling and forgetting, silence and voice, Danticat and Adichie contribute to a solid rethinking of diasporic ethics, where the burden of remembering is inseparable from the recognition of memory's limits.

2. Embodiment and Everyday Politics

In diasporic literature, the body is always a politicized site marked by sites of violence, survival, and negotiation; the body is never neutral or private. In Edwidge Danticat's The *Dew*

Breaker and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*, the body serves as a central locus through which everyday (and other forms of) politics are navigated. The body carries scars and cultural markings, and hair textures that simultaneously signal the history of violence and trauma, race, and identity. Via the politics of hair, hair salons as diasporic "contact zones," and the body as an archive of violence, I suggest both texts dramatize how our lived experience is articulated through embodiment, through embodied signifiers. They also show how the quotidian—what may seem like everyday hair grooming or passing encounters—can serve as a stage for significant negotiations of diasporic identity and belonging.

2.1. Embodiment, Hybridity, and the Politics of Hair

The question of embodiment in postcolonial and diasporic studies has been deeply theorized as a site where colonial power and resistance converge. Frantz Fanon's seminal *Black Skin, White Masks* demonstrates how the racialized body is both overdetermined and silenced within colonial discourses: "In the white world, the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. The image of one's body is solely negating" (Fanon 110). For Fanon, embodiment is inseparable from the racial gaze; the Black subject becomes reduced to epidermal signification, where skin becomes the site of alienation. This insight reverberates in Adichie's *Americanah*, where Ifemelu experiences her hair and skin not as natural but as constantly politicized within American society.

Homi Bhabha expands this conversation with his notion of hybridity, where colonial and postcolonial identities emerge in the "Third Space" of cultural negotiation. He writes, "Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities" (Bhabha 112). Hair salons in *Americanah* epitomize such a Third Space, functioning as diasporic contact zones where African, African American, and Caribbean subjectivities intermingle, negotiate difference, and forge new identities. Mary Louise Pratt's concept of "contact zones"—social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with asymmetrical relations of power (Pratt 34)—helps frame the salon not as a trivial site of grooming but as a microcosm of diasporic politics.

Feminist theory, and particularly that authored by Black feminists, highlights the centrality of hair as a marker of identity and resistance. Audre Lorde's works including poems and essays focus repeatedly on the political implications of self-representation through the body. They insist in the process on the idea that "the master's tools will never dismantle the

master's house" (Lorde 110). This notion is shadowed in Ifemelu's disapproval of chemical relaxers in favor of natural hair, a refusal to conform to Eurocentric beauty standards that were set NOT by those considered "a minority". Similarly, Kobena Mercer's influential essay "Black Hair/Style Politics" situates hair as a symbolic field where race, culture, and politics are contested: "Black hair is a primary symbol of difference" she continued in the essence saying that it is "…a visible marker of the boundary between self and other, natural and cultural" (Mercer 34). These notions mark how *Americanah* makes hair a central metaphor for diasporic negotiation, where salons emerge as zones of both oppression and empowerment.

Meanwhile, in Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*, the engendered politics are far less about beauty practices than about scars, wounds, deep injuries and corporeal inscriptions of violence. The torturer's scar on his face becomes a paradoxical marker of both victimhood and perpetration, an inescapable embodiment of history. Sara Ahmed's work on affective economies comes in handy with the note that: "Emotions do things, and they align individuals with communities" (Ahmed 119). Scars, as highlighted in Danticat's narrative, function affectively, aligning characters with histories of violence that shape diasporic communities. Thus, embodiment in both texts (be it through hair, scars, or physical presence) mirrors how the usual everyday body becomes political, bearing witness to diasporic struggles.

2.2. Hair, Salons, and the Politics of Voice in *Americanah*

In Americanah, hair works as a crucial component that goes through Ifemelu's woven experiences in the diaspora. The story commences with with the latter at a braiding salon in Trenton, New Jersey. The latter is a place that serves as both a literal and symbolic framework for the tale. This salon is regarded as a contact zone, as Pratt describes puts it, a place where African immigrant women, employed as braiders, connect with diasporic clients as they navigate their very pertaining identities in a racially charged America. The salon reflects disparities in class, race, and movement. The hair braiders and Aisha face challenging situations regarding immigration. Ifemelu, on the other hand, regarded as educated vivid socially-wise, holds a valuably distinct position in the diaspora. Nevertheless, the different dialogues bring to life a fabric of common and rather differing experiences. This, consequentially shows the diversification of African Diaspora

Hair in this work is noticed to be politicized. The job interview where Ifemelu was advised to fix, or rather "straighten" her hair: "We want you to look professional. Professional

means straightened, not kinky" (Adichie 251). This exact instance exhibits how the politics of hair interconnect with racism that is seen somehow systemic. Here one notices that professional assimilation requires bodily conformity to Eurocentric norms established by society. Ifemelu's eventual decision to cut her "chemically" fixed/straightened hair and wear it natural becomes a political act of reclaiming authenticity: "She looked in the mirror and, for the first time, liked what she saw. She liked it because it was hers" (Adichie 264). The act of favoring natural hair is deemed personal as much as it is regarded political. This, being done by her, was more of an assertion of Black pride that resists the hunting and taunting pressures of assimilation.

The salon, being deemed a contact zone also unveils the slits and vents within the African diaspora. The braiders, as noticed throughout the work, critique one another's accents, national origins, and life choices, illustrating how diasporic identities are not monolithic. Ifemelu observes in this context that: "They were all African women, but they were not the same" (Adichie 17). The salon, consequentially, becomes a microcosm of transnational identity politics, where one notices that plenty of practices imbedded within, such as hair braiding become grounds for negotiating belonging, difference, and solidarity.

Moreover, Ifemelu's blog on race as alluded to "Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black"intersects with her hair journey. Her post holding the title "A Michelle Obama Shout-Out Plus Hair as Race Metaphor" images how hair in America is never merely aesthetic but political: "The texture of your hair alone can doom or elevate you in America" (Adichie 301). Ifemelu, through her writing, transforms this experience into collective discourse, linking the everyday politics of hair to broader racial structures.

2.3. Silence, Wounds, and the Embodied Archive in *The Dew Breaker*

If *Americanah* foregrounds hair and salons as sites of diasporic politics, *The Dew Breaker* highlights scars and corporeal inscriptions as archives of trauma. The titular "dew breaker" carries a scar across his face, the visible trace of an encounter with a victim who fought back. This scar signifies both his violence and his vulnerability, rendering his body a contested text. Ka, his daughter, reflects on this mark: "The scar was the center of him, the proof of his other life" (Danticat 14). The body here functions as an unavoidable archive, preserving histories that silence seeks to obscure.

Victims, too, endure scars that testify to unspoken violence. Beatrice, tortured under the Duvalier regime, declares: "The scars are inside, where no one can see" (Danticat 85). Her body is regarded as both: a specific sphere of trauma and a locus of memory. Unlike Ifemelu's hair, which is rendered a tool of agency, Beatrice's recorded memory highlights trauma's persistence. The body becomes a witness, even when voice falters. As Caruth suggests, trauma resists full articulation, returning in embodied symptoms (Caruth 5). Danticat dramatizes this in the survivors' silences, their bodies carrying what language cannot. Similar to what silence does.

Everyday life in the Haitian diaspora also reflects embodied negotiations of politics. Characters in the like of Michel, the barber, experience their identities in the banalities and stated trivialities of labor and survival. His hands, cutting hair, are juxtaposed with memories of his father's disappearance, suggesting how ordinary embodiment is haunted by political histories. The barber shop, like Adichie's salon, becomes a diasporic contact zone, where memory and embodiment intertwine in subtle ways.

Danticat also complicates embodiment through the figure of the torturer himself. The scar he holds pictures him not as victim but as perpetrator. Nonetheless, his body becomes an archive of violence. This shakes the existing binaries of oppressor and oppressed. As a result, it proposed the idea that this embodiment itself is ambiguous. It carries numerous, and rather intersecting, meanings. In this context, Danticat attempted to shed light on how everyday embodiment, be it in scars, work, or silence, is inseparable from political histories of trauma and survival.

2.4. The Personal as Political

In examining both novels, some similarities and differences become apparent regarding how embodiment shapes diasporic politics. Hair plays an important role in Americanah, serving as both a daily physical practice and as a site for negotiating assimilation and transgression. Likewise, the scars and trauma depicted in The Dew Breaker illustrate embodiment—a body steeped in history through the imagery of a haunted body. Both texts assert that the personal is political: the hair salon and the scar illustrate how our bodily experiences connect with narratives of race, violence, and diaspora.

Ifemelu's declaration that her hair must be natural parallels Beatrice's assertion that her scars should convey a narrative Both acts refuse erasure: if one accepts the visible diversity of

their hair, the other rejects the silence of lived trauma. Still, the stakes are different. Ifemelu's hair relates directly to negotiating racialized frameworks in the diaspora, while for Beatrice, the scars represent the ramifications of continued authoritarian violence. Collectively, the stories show that embodiment in diaspora serves as resistance, testimony, and vulnerability at the same time.

In addition, the salons in Americanah and the barber shops in The Dew Breaker are also diasporic contact zones. These spaces illustrate how embodied practices (braiding or cutting hair) constitute sites of community formation and negotiation. The salons and barber shops are spaces for contestation and mediation of difference, and where diasporic identities are produced through embodied relationality.

2.5. Embodiment as a Sphere of Oppression and Redefinition

Ultimately, both novels underscore that embodiment is never trivial in diasporic contexts. Hair, scars, skin, and salons become symbolic and material sites where histories of oppression are reinscribed but also where redefinition becomes possible. As Fanon insists, "The Black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man" (Fanon 110), yet Adichie and Danticat suggest that resistance lies precisely in reclaiming embodiment. Ifemelu's hair resists assimilationist erasure; Beatrice's scars resist historical forgetting.

Sara Ahmed noted that "the body takes the shape of the contact it has with the world" (Ahmed 45) and that captures how Ifemelu's and Danticat's characters' bodies reflect upon their diasporic meetings and encounters. Their embodiments are shaped by racial gazes, traumas, and solidarities. This does not negate that they shape these encounters by asserting new significations.

By this logic, embodiment in diaspora emerges as both a site of oppression (ingrained by colonial and authoritarian violence) and a site of creative redefinition. By politicizing the everyday body, *Americanah* and *The Dew Breaker* remind us that diasporic identity is not only negotiated in memory or narrative but inscribed on and through the body. Hair, scars, and salons are not marginal details but central stages upon which the politics of diaspora unfold.

3. Home, Return and the In-Between

Danticat's Breath, Eyes, Memory (1994) and The Dew Breaker (2004), along with Adichie's Americanah (2013), together demonstrate that returning is not about finding a lasting

home but confronting what Svetlana Boym refers to as the "ruins of nostalgia" (Boym 41) "Home," for these authors, is more imagined than lived, more haunted than hospitable. This axis therefore argues that both Danticat and Adichie reframe the myth of return in diasporic imagination by presenting home as fractured, ambivalent, and never fully attainable.

3.1. Home and Return as a Problematic

The term "home" in Diasporic Literature transcends mere physical space or a static point of origin; it entangles an emotional, symbolic, and communicative concept impacted mainly by memory, trauma, and the unavoidable unease of being uprooted altogether. Writers from formerly colonized countries or as migrants since they are set against the backdrop of belonging, frequently question simplistic notions of belonging in their creations, observing that returns often involve dissonance instead of harmony. In this regard, the writings of Danticat and Adichie offer crucial yet distant distinct interpretations of leaving, return, and existence in the transitional space. Both authors recognize the inevitable disjointed emotional truths of diaspora: nostalgia in this context coexists with alienation, ambivalence interrupts longing and belonging, and identities span various geographies.

Theoretically, this exploration draws upon Homi Bhabha's notion of the "third space," Avtar Brah's "diaspora space," Stuart Hall's cultural identity as "production" rather than essence, Paul Gilroy's "Black Atlantic," and Boym's analysis of nostalgia. These frameworks illuminate how both writers articulate "partial belongings" — a condition of living in-between identities and geographies that resists closure but generates new cultural possibilities. In what follows, I will trace this condition through five interrelated movements: (1) the myth of return in diasporic imagination, (2) affective dissonance as a mode of nostalgia and estrangement, (3) the in-between space of hybridity and fragmentation, (4) gender, memory, and the specificity of women's negotiations of home, and (5) the re-imagining of "partial belonging" as a positive diasporic ontology.

3.2. The Myth of Return in Diaspora

The notion of return has long been part of diasporic thought. It functions as both utopian promise and impossible horizon. Robin Cohen in *Global Diasporas* focused on the idea that diasporic communities often "nourish an idealization of the homeland that is more symbolic

than empirical" (Cohen 9). For Danticat's Haitian characters and Adichie's Nigerian migrants, this "myth of return" is central but immensely destabilized.

Sophie's return to Haiti in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* is not a mere restoration of long lost belonging but rather an implicit exposure to what is referred to as "intergenerational trauma". This return is marked by both intimacy and alienation. We notice the existence of the familiar Creole phrases, smells, and landscapes. These notions were infused with estrangement. Sophie narrates, "The roads, the trees, the little hills—they were all the same as in my mother's stories, but I was a stranger walking among them" (Danticat, 78). This shows the intricacy of the paradox this return possesses: the homeland exists as an intimate memory as it subsists as a foreign terrain.

Similarly, in *The Dew Breaker*, return is layered with political violence. The title character, a former torturer from Duvalier's regime, embodies how home can be a site of horror rather than comfort. The Haitian diaspora's relationship to "home" is scarred by trauma, which undermines any uncomplicated nostalgia. Carole Boyce Davies observes that Caribbean return narratives often involve "an ambivalence between longing and repudiation" (Davies 113). Danticat's fiction exemplifies this: Haiti is regarded as a cherished homeland yet, it continues to be deemed an unbearable burden, particularly when confronting the ghosts of political violence.

Americanah by Adichie stages the" myth of return" through the decision Ifemelu made to leave the U.S. and go back to Nigeria. This eventual return is triggered not only by disillusionment with America but also by a sense of incompleteness: "She was tired of explaining herself in a country where she would always be a stranger" (Adichie 13). Yet, upon her return to Lagos, she endures some experiences that are mated with estrangement. Lagos was somehow Overwhelming, vibrant, and to an extent not fully hers: "She was back, she was home, yet it felt different, as though she had returned to a place that no longer remembered her fully" (Adichie 476). Similarly to Danticat's Sophie, Ifemelu came to realize that home is altered by her absence and most crucially by her transformed subjectivity.

In both cases, the myth of return collapses. Rather than a redemptive closure, return accentuates dissonance. Stuart Hall theorizes cultural identity as "not an essence but a positioning" (Hall 394) becomes instructive. In this context, identity is not recovered upon return; it is reformulated through dislocation and hybridity. Both Danticat and Adichie note that

diasporic identity does not culminate in a return to wholeness. The emphasize that it persists as an unfinished/incomplete negotiation.

3.3. Nostalgia, Estrangement, and Emotional Conflict

The emotional imagery of return is redundantly filled with oppositions. Nostalgia (that is the longing for home) coexists with estrangement and discomfort in parallel. Svetlana Boym distinguishes between "restorative nostalgia," which seeks mainly to rebuild and reconstruct lost homes, and "reflective nostalgia," which dwells deep within the concepts of longing and ambivalence (Boym 41). Danticat and Adichie together went for the side of reflective nostalgia. With this, they attempted to focalize on the the impossibility of absolute restoration.

In Breath, Eyes, Memory, Sophie's return is filled with emotional conflict. She experiences the warmth of family when hugged and embraced by Tante Atie. In this instant, she also felt the unease of being rushed back to a societal sphere where cultural customs (particularly the ritual of virginity testing) have immensely impacted her. Sophie contemplates: "I desired to fit in, but my body held memories that separated me" (Danticat, Breath 132). In this sphere, home entangles both affection and aggression altogether. Marianne Hirsch's notion of "postmemory," where she reflepcted upon trauma, and how the latter is passed down through generations sheds light on Sophie's dilemma (Hirsch 22). Sophie's own trauma is rooted in her mother's experiences. This, in return is an indicator that coming back includes both nostalgia and facing inherited pain.

The Dew Breaker intensifies emotional dissonance via its disjointed stories of Haitian exiles. For instance, the character Anne resides in New York but stays connected to her homeland through recollection and silence. Upon her return to Haiti, she experiences a mix of familiarity and alienation : "The sea smelled the same, but the silence of the mountains frightened her" (Danticat, Dew 184). Danticat captures how affective registers split between comfort and terror, refusing the fantasy of seamless reintegration.

Adichie's Ifemelu also embodies affective dissonance. Her nostalgia for Nigeria is evident in her constant monitoring of Nigerian blogs while in the U.S., yet her return is riddled with discomfort. Upon arrival, she feels alienated by the casual corruption, infrastructural dysfunction, and new class codes. She admits: "She was neither fully American nor fully Nigerian; she belonged nowhere, and everywhere at once" (Adichie 475). Boyce Davies terms

this condition "migratory subjectivity," where the self is perpetually in motion, unable to settle into singular belonging (Davies 137).

This emotional conflict is dramatized by Adichie through Ifemelu's experienced relationships. Her reunion with Obinze reignites passion but is dimmed by the years lost and the people they have become ultimately. Likewise, Danticat's dissonance is dramatized in Sophie's relationship with her mother, Martine. This eventually oscillates between love and unbearable distance. Both authors tried to indicate how diaspora produces fractured emotional landscapes, where homecomings intensify rather than resolve affective contradictions unlike what is traditionally shared about returning home.

3.4. Hybridity and Fragmented Belonging in Betweenness

If return does not deliver closure, it instead produces what Bhabha coined the "third space" an in-between cultural terrain where hybrid identities emerge (Bhabha 56). For Danticat and Adichie, the in-between is not entirely liminal but constitutive of diasporic subjectivity.

In *The Dew Breaker*, hybridity appears explicitly in the simultaneous subsistence of Haitian cultural memory with American diasporic life. The characters undergo Haitian rituals (that would encompass cooking, storytelling, language) while going through with their lives in Brooklyn's immigrant neighborhoods. Nonetheless these practices are marked by fragmentation: Haitian Creole coexists with English, memories of dictatorship coexist with the routines of immigrant survival. Avtar Brah's concept of "diaspora space," where multiple subject positions intersect, clarifies this hybridity (Brah 209). For Danticat, Haitian diaspora is not about a singular homeland but about negotiating multiple cultural inheritances in tension.

In *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Sophie's identity is the bridge connecting Haitian traditions to American feminist consciousness. When she stood up to the practice of virginity testing which she deemed extreme, she invoked Western discourses of bodily autonomy. Nevertheless, she could not simply reject Haiti since her identity is ingrained in Creole language and maternal memory. This subjectivity she ensnared was fragmented, occupying in the process an in-between that is agonizing and generative all at once.

Ifemelu in the other literary work witnesses similar sense of hybridization. While in America, she discovers racial sects that were not even a thought in Nigeria. "I did not think of myself as Black until I came to America" (Adichie 273). Upon her return to Nigeria she felt as

an insider but it was accompanied by a feeling of being an outsider (someone who did not really belong there), chastised for her American accent and habits yet still deeply Nigerian. This reflects upon Paul Gilroy's "Black Atlantic" thesis, where diasporic identity travels beyond and transcends national territories forming hybrid cultural circuits (Gilroy 4). Ifemelu's in-betweenness is not simply lack but the very essence of her diasporic subjectivity.

Comparatively, one might recall Jhumpa Lahiri's diasporic characters that also inhabit fractured identities in *The Namesake*. By all means, Danticat and Adichie straightened the path for the political and gendered stakes of hybridity more forcefully. For them, the in-between is not just generational but also shaped by histories of colonial violence, dictatorship, and transatlantic racial hierarchies inherited and manifested in coming generations.

3.5. Women's Particular Negotiations of Partial Belonging

Both Danticat and Adichie emphasize that the experience of return and belonging is gendered. For women, "home" is not only about geography but also about bodily memory, patriarchal expectations, and intergenerational trauma. Gayatri Spivak noted in this context that the subaltern woman often bears the burden of cultural authenticity (Spivak 90).

In *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Sophie's return confronts her with her mother's traumatic history of rape under Duvalier's regime and the practice of virginity testing. Home, here, is inseparable from gendered violence. Sophie observes: "The testing was a torture. It was not love" (Danticat, *Breath* 155). Her attempt to reconcile with Haiti is haunted by her mother's trauma, transmitted across generations. Hirsch's "postmemory" concept helps us see how Sophie embodies the memory of a violence she did not directly experience. Return, for her, is not liberation but a confrontation with inherited pain.

Adichie's Ifemelu also experiences return through gendered lenses. Nigerian society imposes expectations of femininity, marriage, and respectability. Upon returning, she faces criticism for her single status: "People asked why she was not married, as though marriage were the ultimate validation of a woman's life" (Adichie 503). Her negotiation of home is therefore entangled with gendered reintegration. Unlike Sophie, Ifemelu confronts not inherited trauma but contemporary patriarchy and social policing.

Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity marks how these women's belonging is regulated by cultural scripts (Butler 33). Sophie is noticed to endure through silence and movement; Ifemelu endures through words — her frank blogging on race, gender, and Nigerian culture. Both writs with their respective writers assert that women's return back home is intricate both ways: it entangles not just diasporic alienation but also patriarchal limitations that hinder that sole sense of longing and belonging.

This section of negotiation that is quite gendered differs from male-focused diasporic stories like Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, in which he pictures hybridity but connects it less to physical trauma. Danticat and Adichie stand by the notion that women encounter incomplete connections due to both diasporic dissonance and gender-based oppression. This results, ultimately, a complex state of in-betweenness.

3.6. Toward Partial Belongings: Reimagining Home Beyond Borders

If homecomings are riddled with affective dissonance and fragmented belongings, what remains? For both Danticat and Adichie, the answer is apparently not despair but rather a reimagining of home as partial, plural, and transnational.

Danticat's characters often forge belonging through storytelling and communal memory rather than territorial rootedness. In *The Dew Breaker*, the fragmented narratives themselves create a communal archive that transcends fixed notions of home. The characters belong not by recovering a stable Haiti but by carrying Haiti's memory into diasporic spaces.

Adichie's Ifemelu ultimately accepts her hybrid identity. Her return to Nigeria is regarded as not complete a kind of reconciliation but rather an embrace of her in-between stature. She acknowledges a certain form of belonging simply by resuming and assuming her relationship with Obinze. This hybridized identity is deemed neither purely Nigerian nor American. It is considered as a uniquely diasporic identity

On a different point, Derek Walcott's poetry often imagines home as a palimpsest of numerous histories rather than a singular origin. Simultaneously, Jhumpa Lahiri's diasporic characters accept fragmented identities ascribed to them as their condition of life. Danticat and Adichie contribute immensely to this tradition by shaping partial belonging as a possibility rather than regard it as a failure.

Avtar Brah insists that "diaspora space" is a site of new cultural production, not mere loss (Brah 211). For Danticat and Adichie, partial belongings enable alternative forms of solidarity, creativity, and identity. In their works, home is no longer confined to territorial return but expanded into narrative, affect, and relational ties that traverse borders.

Edwidge Danticat and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie deconstruct the notion of home as constant or restorative by their intricate representations of return. Their characters undergo emotional dissonance (a sense nostalgia mixed with the feeling of alienation) and occupy in-between realms that create mixed hybrid identities. For women specifically, home is additionally complicated by recollections, trauma, and patriarchal limitations. This would eventually result in a sense of belonging that is incomplete but profoundly emotional.

Ingraining different ideas related to space, nostalgia and identity, this part of the chapter denoted that home in diasporic literature will always remain multifaceted. Additionally, it is transformed into a realm of uncertainty and innovation. Danticat and Adichie walk the same path of conveying that belonging in diaspora will always be wanting, but profusely productive despite the difference in their respective national settings as writers.

One notices a shared conclusion by placing Adichie and Danticat's writs side to side with other diasporic writers like Rushdie, Lahiri, and Walcott. The latter may be that diasporic literature does not mourn the impossibility of return but redefines it differently as multiplicity. Within this redefinition, affective dissonance is deemed not singularly a failure of belonging but also a testimony to the persistence and creativity of diasporic hybridized identities. Consequently, "partial belongings" are not limitations but novel ways of imagining home in a world shaped by migration, displacement, and transnational links.

CONCLUSION

The readings of Danticat and Adichie across the three axes—memory, identity, and home—demonstrate that diasporic literature does not simply recount displacement but actively theorizes it. Through their narratives, memory emerges as an ethical responsibility: a demand to voice silenced traumas, as in *The Dew Breaker*'s fractured testimonies or *Breath, Eyes, Memory*'s intergenerational wounds. Identity is revealed not as a fixed inheritance but as a shifting, negotiated practice, embodied in Sophie's fragmented selfhood or Ifemelu's oscillating racial consciousness in the United States and Nigeria. Home, finally, is neither a lost

paradise nor a fully recoverable destination. It is, instead a sphere of in-betweenness characterized by affective dissonance, a mixture of nostalgia and estrangement, and a condition of "partial belongings" that reaches across and beyond multitudinous geographies.

These insights if considered as a whole, suggest that diasporic fiction is far less mimetic bthan it is epistemological. It allows vast room for thinking about exile, belonging, and hybridization in ways that exceed the conventional obvious social theory. The could-be result of such an inquiry is deemed a reorientation of how we comprehend diaspora itself (not as a fracture endured in perpetuity but as a mode of being-in-relation), where multiplicity, ambivalence, and hybridity form might rather than deficiency and weakness.

The chapter's comparative framework has attempted to highlight that while Danticat and Adichie write from different historical locations (different geographies), their penned pieces of art amalgamate in reimagining the diasporic subject as one that strongly rejects erasure by occupying the in-between. Their poetic notions on memory, identity, and home consequentially craft a new cartography of belonging (one that resonates with the wider diasporic imagination of the Black Atlantic and beyond rather than just Haitian and Nigerian experiences. Danticat and Adichie affirm that diaspora is not simply about leaving or returning but about inhabiting a world where belonging is always negotiated, contingent, and profoundly creative. This conclusion came along their representation of voices, trauma, identities, and belonging.

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PART THREE

Exile, State Collapse, and Intellectual Displacement

CHAPTER 6

A Literary Continuum of State Collapse and Exile: From Khalifa to El Akkad

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ABSTRACT

This scholarly contribution investigates how Khaled Khalifa's *No Knives in the Kitchens of This City* and Omar El Akkad's *American War* conceptualize exile within contexts of state collapse. It frames the analysis through three lenses: postcolonial theory, state failure, and diaspora studies, to argue that both texts portray exile as an evolving continuum linking repression, displacement, and identity transformation. The guiding research question is: How do Khalifa and El Akkad jointly conceptualize exile as a continuum that extends from internalized dispossession under authoritarian rule to transnational displacement under global precarity? Khalifa's Syria exemplifies internal exile produced by authoritarianism and surveillance, while El Akkad projects these dynamics into a speculative American future shaped by climate catastrophe and civil war. Together, these novels demonstrate how literature functions as a counter-archive, documenting both the material devastation of failed governance and its cultural, psychological, and intergenerational consequences. By situating Khalifa's portrayal of Syrian authoritarianism and El Akkad's speculative America within a shared continuum of collapse, this work also reflects the lived dynamics of the Syrian refugee crisis, grounding its comparative frame in one of the most acute displacement emergencies of the twenty-first century. Ultimately, this study argues that both narratives challenge the distinctions

between homeland and exile, belonging and erasure, and articulate a diasporic consciousness rooted in both memory and migration.

Keywords: diaspora, internal exile, failed state, postcolonial literature, Syrian conflict, displacement narratives

INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century witnessed an escalating scholarly interest in narratives that explore political disintegration, governmental collapse, and forced displacement. These narratives portray actual crises and creatively reinterpret the precarities inherent in the global order. In the realm of postcolonial and diasporic literature, Khaled Khalifa's *No Knives in the Kitchens of This City* and Omar El Akkad's *American War* are notable for fusing historical memory with speculative foresight, illustrating collapse as both a political reality and an everyday experience. Khalifa's novel, set in Baʿathist Syria, reflects a history influenced by Ottoman, French, and post-independence authoritarian rule, while El Akkad's work shifts the themes of war, displacement, and humanitarian crises into a conjectural future United States torn apart by climate change and civil dispute. Considered concurrently, these two accounts create a literary continuum that affords a profound contemplation on the mental and physical structures of ruined nations.

Erudite critics often emphasize Khalifa's consistent representation of life under Syrian authoritarian rule, positioning him as a key chronicler of his country's decline into civic decay (Cooke 17; Creswell 42). His storytelling that integrates family saga with political allegory depicts the city as an "urban necropolis" shaped by slow violence. El Akkad's *American War* has been studied by literary scholars of climate fiction and speculative war narratives, with Gerry Canavan describing its "dystopian realism" as a combination of documentary style and imagined civil conflict (Canavan). Considering that Khalifa is primarily analyzed within Middle Eastern literary studies and El Akkad within speculative and climate fiction, it is noteworthy that direct comparisons between the two are seldom made.

Reading *No Knives* alongside *American War* reveals a parallel pattern of state collapse and exile that transcends specific geographies and temporal contexts. El Akkad's portrayal of the U.S., which has lost its superpower status and faces foreign intervention, mirrors crises often associated with formerly colonized nations. This cross-examination questions the notion that

postcolonial criticism should be confined to the Global South, highlighting that the lasting impacts of empire and fragile states are worldwide concerns (Said 54; Hall 225).

This study employs three intersecting theoretical frameworks. Postcolonial theory, particularly Edward Said's concept of "imaginative geographies" (54) and Homi Bhabha's theorization of hybrid identities (115), underpins the analysis of domination, belonging, and exile. State failure theory, as formulated by Robert Rotberg, delineates the mechanisms of state collapse, loss of legitimacy, breakdown of authority, and the replacement of governance with militia rule (4). Achille Mbembe's necropolitics reframes such collapses as a deliberate political structuring of life and death (11). Finally, diaspora studies, especially Avtar Brah's concept of "homing desire" (193) and Khachig Tölölyan's research on transnational displacement (14), address the psychological and cultural dimensions of exile.

By means of this triangulation, Khalifa's Aleppo is regarded as a locus of internal exile, wherein the disintegration of state legitimacy is reflected in the erosion of familial bonds, cultural memory, and personal agency (Khalifa 29). El Akkad's depiction of America projects these crises into the future, illustrating a scenario in which climate catastrophe, civil war, and forced migration institutionalize the exilic condition on a global scale (El Akkad 76). Both narratives render exile not only as a binary condition of presence and absence but as a continuum, ranging from the gradual attrition of belonging to the violent displacements associated with statelessness.

This chapter is divided into several interrelated sections. It starts with a theoretical overview that precedes the section exploring Khalifa's representation of internal exile in Syrian authoritarianism. Next, it analyzes El Akkad's speculative portrayal of displacement in a fragmenting America, followed by a comparative analysis placing both works within a transnational continuum of exile and collapse. The subsequent segments discuss how literature acts as both a record and a form of resistance, safeguarding human stories that state violence strives to erase. In summary, the analysis begins with theoretical foundations, turns to Khalifa's Syria, proceeds to El Akkad's speculative America, offers a comparative juxtaposition, and culminates in thematic reflections on memory, alienation, death, and resilience before concluding with the broader implications for postcolonial, state-failure, and diasporic studies.Eventually, this chapter contends that by engaging Khalifa and El Akkad in ongoing dialogue, literature does more than just document political disasters; it also rewrites the stories of those affected. Both *No Knives in the Kitchens of This City* and *American War* explore

different levels of societal collapse, revealing a common language of loss, memory, and resilience that characterizes life under dubious governance (Brah 195; Clifford 308).

1. Exile, Rupture, and the State in Crisis

"In the South, we learned to live without the future. It had been taken from us long before the war" (El Akkad 102)

To analyze Khaled Khalifa's *No Knives in the Kitchens of This City* and Omar El Akkad's *American War* under the thematic scope of exile and displacement, this chapter uses a triangulated theoretical framework rooted in postcolonial theory, failed-state discourse, and diaspora studies. This interdisciplinary approach redirects attention from the disintegration of institutions to the transformation of identities, landscapes, and the narrative frameworks that emerge from disruption.

Postcolonial theory emphasizes exile and displacement as historically ingrained and psychologically persistent conditions, where identity is shaped between "loss and survival". According to Edward Said, exile signifies an "unhealable rift" between individuals and their environment, reshaping perception, language, and cultural memory (Said 173). Homi Bhabha's concept of the "third space" describes an ambiguous, contested zone where the postcolonial subject is constructed in relation to and against dominant power (Bhabha 56). Within this framework, the literature of breakdown illustrates how authoritarian violence and enforced silence create internal exile, leading to fractured identities that fluctuate between attempts to remember and forget.

Failed-state discourse offers terminology for understanding the material degeneration underlying these psychological states. Robert Rotberg characterizes failed states as those in which governments are incapable of providing essential political services, security, legitimate governance, and welfare, thereby fostering circumstances conducive to non-state violence and systemic collapse (Rotberg 4). This perspective encompasses a spectrum ranging from the local deterioration of institutions, social bonds, and civic trust to broader global challenges, including mass displacement, statelessness, and climate-related conflicts. It underscores the manner in which structural violence displaces individuals and erodes identities.

Diaspora studies constitute the final aspect, emphasizing the psychological, cultural, and intergenerational effects of displacement. Khachig Tölölyan defines diaspora as a

"transnational dispersion of a people" maintained through connections to a real or imagined homeland (Tölölyan 14). In parallel, Avtar Brah sees diaspora as a continuous state of belonging and identity that is negotiated via movement, memory, and cultural expression (Brah 193). Thus, exile evolves from a mere act of departure into a profound experience of dislocation, wherein identity is shaped by the enduring influence of memory and the practical adversities associated with survival in hostile environments.

These three paradigms orient an interpretation of literature as an archive of collapse: a documentation of the psychological landscapes of exile, the structural grammar of failed states, and the evolving contours of diasporic identities. Considered in unison, they justify approaching the two novels as points along a single continuum, linking local authoritarianism to global dislocation.

Having outlined these theoretical coordinates, the following sections will explore how they shed light on the unique historical and political contexts of Khalifa's and El Akkad's accounts. The upcoming section analyzes how postcolonial rupture, driven by inherited imperial legacies and modern authoritarianism, serves as the basis for each novel's exposition of state crisis.

2. Postcolonial Ruptures and the Legacy of Domination

In *No Knives in the Kitchens of This City*, postcolonial upheaval results from the amalgamation of inherited colonial methods and domestic authoritarian practices. The Baʿathist regime leverages surveillance tools and cultural suppression to maintain control internally. The mother's focus on purity symbolizes the internalization of colonial binaries, such as purity versus corruption and loyalty versus deviation, that she projects onto her children. Characters like Nizar and Rashid face these imposed moral boundaries at great personal risk, with their actions limited by the state's moral framework.

On the other hand, *American War* highlights how the United States faces postcolonial vulnerabilities. Factors like foreign aid from the Bouazizi Union, international observers, and territorial divisions undermine the idea of American exceptionalism. This reversal challenges conventional global power dynamics and compels Western audiences to acknowledge the pervasive nature of political uncertainty (El Akkad 45).

In *No Knives*, the legacy of Syria's colonial past, including Ottoman and French administrative systems characterized by centralized authority, surveillance, and cultural

suppression, is subsumed into Baʿathist governance (Khalifa 123). Aleppo's evolution, from neighborhoods filled with "smells of spring" to streets patrolled by "low-ranking soldiers and peasants" and contaminated by sewage, embodies Partha Chatterjee's concept of 'rule by enclosure,' where the state dominates both public and private life (Khalifa 163; Chatterjee 44).

In *American War*, El Akkad presents the United States as a ravaged post-imperial state, fractured by environmental catastrophe and internal discord, dependent on foreign assistance, and vulnerable to geopolitical interference. This portrayal resonates with Edward Said's assertion that postcolonial conditions seldom sever ties with imperial motives; rather, they transform the mechanisms of domination (Said 198). Ultimately, the U.S. emerges as the recipient of interventions it once instigated, underscoring the cyclical nature of geopolitical subjugation.

Concurrently, the two novels deconstruct nationalist myths. Khalifa critiques the vacuity of Baʿathist pan-Arab ideals, while El Akkad interrogates the notion of American exceptionalism. Both works illustrate the interconnection between authoritarianism and state failure, culminating in analogous outcomes: reduced civic trust, politicized identity, and normalized violence.

This continuum is dynamic and structured. While the postcolonial rupture elucidates the origins of political instability, the subsequent step involves investigating how this fragility is manifested within everyday environments, public institutions, and social relationships. In Khalifa's Aleppo and El Akkad's war-torn America, state failure doesn't occur suddenly; it gradually infiltrates infrastructure, governance, and moral norms, making collapse both unavoidable and often invisible. This prompts an investigation into the fundamental structure of decay.

3. State Failure and the Architecture of Decay

> *"Cities like ours do not collapse in a day. They rust from the inside,*
> *until the dust begins to breathe"* (Khalifa 56)

Robert Rotberg's theoretical model, which examines state failure, loss of legitimacy, dissolution of public services, and the rise of non-state violence, provides a clear perspective for analyzing these novels. In No Knives in the Kitchens of This City, the Syrian state's excessive authority leads to oppressive control: "The herd was the most successful invention to

ensure that all ideas… would pass away into nothing" (Khalifa 147). Therefore, the deterioration of infrastructure, the contraction of the economy, and the omnipresence of political police as agents of fear are surveyed. Simultaneously, American War shows the reverse: the disbandment of central authority has led to the emergence of fragmented sovereignties and the militarization of quotidian life. Refugee camps operate as "shadow-states," where survival is contingent upon the charity of those who harbor animosity (El Akkad 75).

Achille Mbembe's theory of *necropolitics*, 'the power and capacity to dictate who may live and who must die' (Mbembe 11), elucidates a common foundation: whether through extensive control or total neglect, the state exercises authority over life and death, determining not only who survives but also the conditions under which survival occurs. Decay manifests in physical spaces, such as ruined buildings in Aleppo and toxic wastelands in the American South; socially, as the erosion of trust; and morally, through habituation to cruelty and betrayal.

The diminution of authority in both novels demonstrates how governance devolves into repression, with legal frameworks primarily focused on maintaining the state. Khalifa illustrates this with the "herd" metaphor, depicting a system that seeks to domesticate thought and suppress dissent, a form of internal colonization that controls both culture and bodies (Khalifa 147). El Akkad echoes this idea by portraying civil war not as a sudden break but as the final stage of a gradual decline: "The country had been dying for a long time, but when the war came, it finished the job" (El Akkad 29). Collectively, these views connect the slow decay of Aleppo with the United States' eventual disintegration, unveiling how emergency rule exacerbates existing systemic issues within the political order.

Khalifa's description of Syria under the Baʿath regime highlights key features of state failure: systemic decay, economic collapse, and the dominance of political rhetoric. The image of a dilapidated house with sealed windows and peeling walls acts as a metaphor for national stagnation. The street's shift from "lettuce fields and cherry trees" to alleys filled with sewage, patrolled by soldiers and displaced peasants, illustrates the disintegration of public life (Khalifa 123, 163; Chatterjee 44).

In a similar vein, *American War* illustrates the deterioration of public infrastructure in the context of climate catastrophe and civil unrest. Inundated coastlines, deserted areas, and mass displacements diminish governance to military outposts and warlord dominance,

mirroring the authoritarian microstructures Khalifa describes in Syrian neighborhoods. Refugee camps, such as Camp Patience, function as semi-autonomous entities, establishing their own self-governance structures while simultaneously promoting both solidarity and extremism.

Across both narratives, the degradation of environmental, political, and infrastructural systems converges to erode civic solidarity, resulting in the emergence of tenuous survival networks. Khalifa's Aleppo reflects this decline through crumbling plaster, corrupt institutions, and citizens' silence. El Akkad's America evinces it in deserted cities, broken roads, and divided jurisdictions. Conjointly, the two narratives underscore the multifaceted nature of collapse, illustrating its manifestation from the intricate dynamics of neighborhood life to the extensive transformation of entire global regions.This corrosion fundamentally alters the meaning of home. The corrosion of public trust, the militarization of space, and the debasement of civic life are intricately linked to the psychological disruptions they engender. This process, which begins with infrastructural decay, ultimately transforms the concept of belonging. In Khalifa and El Akkad's works, the architecture of collapse prepares the ground for a deeper change: the fracturing of home into a place of exile, whether inside the city or beyond hostile borders.

4. Khalifa's Syria: Internal Exile Without Departure

"You can stay in your homeland and still be exiled from it." (Kanafani 12)

In *No Knives in the Kitchens of This City*, Khaled Khalifa depicts an Aleppo languishing under a slow, oppressive rhythm as society crumbles beneath its own silences (Khalifa 62). Subsequently, exile transcends mere physical departure, manifesting as a persistent condition characterized by the gradual erosion of identity within the ostensibly familiar confines of one's home. This condition reflects what Edward Said refers to as "internal exile", defined as 'estrangement within the familiar,' where displacement is imposed not by movement but by sustained political repression (Said 174). Individuals find themselves estranged from their own sense of self, residing in a city where once intimate spaces have been irrevocably altered by fear, repression, and loss (Brah 194). This phenomenon represents a dual failure, both political and personal, as the state has systematically undermined the bonds of memory, kinship, and desire, thereby transforming daily existence into a landscape of alienation (Rotberg 1–45).

Postcolonial theory conceptualizes this internal exile as a form of violence that transcends physical displacement, persisting even when the individual remains geographically stationary (Said 174). In Khalifa's story, silence is not only an absence but a way of surviving,

influencing thought and memory until speaking out becomes risky and ineffective. "Even the walls had stopped listening" (Khalifa 62), a character notes, illustrating a cultural environment where witnessing is impossible and forgetting serves as a means of endurance.

The theory of failed states elucidates the political structure underlying this condition. Syria, under authoritarian governance, exemplifies Rotberg's definition of a failed state where security devolves into violence and governance becomes a spectacle of fear (Rotberg 4). The dismantling of political legitimacy reflects the disintegration of domestic life: mothers are unable to protect their children from the secret police, siblings suspect one another, and households, once places of sustenance, transform into sites of whispered dissent.

Diaspora studies shed light on Khalifa's exposition of displacement devoid of physical movement. Avtar Brah observes that exile and diaspora are influenced equally by adverse conditions and geographical separation, which involve "the experience of displacement and the negotiations of identity" within one's own homeland (Brah 194). In Khalifa's Aleppo, the city functions as a palimpsest where layers of memory are overwritten by grief and surveillance, resulting in an exile moored in place rather than physical departure.

The novel's temporal shifts illuminate the transgenerational transmission of fear and silence. With each passing decade, additional erasures occur, resulting in memory becoming fragmented and preserved only within the interstices of censored dialogues. Khalifa rejects the resolution: there is no point of return, only ongoing negotiation with a home that has become unrecognizable. In this manner, *No Knives in the Kitchens of This City* functions as a record of internal exile, illustrating how the disintegration of state legitimacy manifests as the erosion of identity and memory. A striking example occurs in Rashid's death, where Khalifa depicts the collapse of familial intimacy under authoritarian decay. The sensory detail of Rashid's breath and the silence imposed on the family dramatize internal exile not as movement but as suffocation. This passage aligns with Said's claim that exile is a condition of estrangement within the familiar, highlighting the slow violence that redefines home as a site of spiritual and emotional detachment (Khalifa 147). This redefines the concept of homeland as a potential site of exile, where the notions of belonging and erasure coexist in a delicate tension. This conceptual framework will be further explored within the context of broader diasporic and transnational displacements in the subsequent section.

5. El Akkad's America: Displacement in a Future Failed State

"The war had remade the country, and there was no going back."

(El Akkad 324)

If Khalifa's Syria exemplifies the internal disintegration of identity within the boundaries of a present failed state, Omar El Akkad's *American War* extrapolates such collapse into a speculative future where climate change, civil conflict, and political fragmentation engender a globalized landscape of displacement. In this scenario, the United States, once the orchestrator of interventions in failed states abroad, is reimagined as a terrain characterized by devastation, detention centers, and extensive refugee movements. The familiar becomes alien, rendering the homeland an uninhabitable exile from which return is unattainable.

Postcolonial theory interprets El Akkad's narrative as an exploration of colonial logics embedded in acts of state violence, explicating how systems of exclusion and coercion persist even amidst the disintegration of the nation-state. The protagonist, Sarat, is not merely displaced; she is a subject constructed within the violent lexicon of a collapsing state, her identity shaped through experiences of internment, loss, and radicalization. Homi Bhabha's concept of the "third space" of hybridity resonates profoundly here, as Sarat simultaneously resists and internalizes the structures that displace her (Bhabha 56).

Robert Rotberg's conceptualization of a failed state is illustrated in American War through the Southern secession, the disintegration of civil order, and the evolution of refugee camps into hubs of militarization and indoctrination (Rotberg 1-45). The disintegration is systemic: ecological catastrophe exacerbates political fracture, and displacement becomes an enduring, generational condition rather than a temporary disruption.From the perspective of diaspora studies, Sarat's journey exemplifies how compelled migration redefines identity within interrelated frameworks of global and local violence. Khachig Tölölyan's conceptualization of diaspora and Avtar Brah's focus on displacement are both pertinent therefore (Tölölyan 14; Brah 193). Sarat's radicalization is demonstrated to be intrinsically linked to her exile, highlighting that displacement entails not merely physical border crossings but also a significant transformation of self, influenced by the exigencies of survival and resistance (El Akkad 75). In Camp Patience, Sarat's transformation unfolds through conditions of climate precarity and chronic deprivation. The narrative lingers on mud, hunger, and bodily deterioration, anchoring the abstract notion of state failure in embodied suffering. These scenes

exemplify how exile evolves into statelessness, foreshadowing Sarat's radicalization by depicting not only the loss of home but the corrosion of the body itself. Sarat's journey exemplifies the descent into "statelessness*"*, a condition in which one is stripped of political recognition and the 'right to have rights' (Arendt 296), exposing how the failed state reduces identity to mere survival.

In El Akkad's representation of America, displacement extends beyond geography, manifesting itself in physical bodies, memories, and political identities. The novel mirrors contemporary crises, echoing the forced migrations of the Syrian conflict while positioning them within a speculative future that globalizes the mode of exile. By linking environmental degradation to state failure, *American War* highlights the interconnectedness of ecological, political, and humanitarian crises, urging readers to acknowledge that instability in one domain can have far-reaching consequences beyond its immediate context.

6. Comparative Juxtaposition: A Literary Continuum

> *"Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home."* (Said 173)

Analyzing the juxtaposition of *No Knives in the Kitchens of This City* and *American War* uncovers a continuum of exile that extends from the personal spaces within authoritarian Syria to the broader geopolitical terrains of a fragmented future America. Khaled Khalifa and Omar El Akkad, through their respective geographical and temporal contexts, delineate the anatomy of state failure and its violent genealogies of displacement, illustrating exile as a condition that influences identity, memory, and resistance.

A close comparative reading underscores this continuum. Khalifa's description that "the walls had stopped listening" (Khalifa 62) evokes a society where silence has replaced speech and surveillance has supplanted intimacy, dramatizing the psychic cost of internal exile. In contrast, El Akkad's portrayal of Sarat, told that "hope is the cruelest weapon" (El Akkad 241), captures the emotional manipulation embedded in exile, where despair becomes institutionalized and radicalization emerges as a survival mechanism. Juxtaposing these passages illuminates exile not merely as departure but as suffocation, where memory, silence, and violence intersect across distinct sociopolitical contexts.

This thematic overlap is further intensified when considering El Akkad's placement within climate-fiction scholarship. *American War* dramatizes the Anthropocene as lived catastrophe, portraying refugee populations as "ghosted communities" suspended in spaces of abandonment and historical amnesia (Carmona-Rodríguez 65). Critics such as Boyden highlight the novel's temporal complexity, noting how it challenges generational timescapes by rethinking kinship and ecological ethics (Boyden 45). Weik von Mossner emphasizes "weaponized empathy" as central to Sarat's portrayal, where suffering becomes both internalized and politicized (Weik von Mossner 629). El Akkad himself has remarked that climate change shapes "both physical and emotional geographies," suggesting that exile in his narrative is mapped not just through movement but through environmental precarity and systemic collapse (Brady).

Thus, *American War* stands firmly within contemporary cli-fi debates, amplifying literature's role in narrating planetary precarity and connecting state failure to global ecological injustice. When placed alongside *No Knives in the Kitchens of This City*, the novel extends the conceptual arc of exile from political repression to climate-induced statelessness. Together, Khalifa and El Akkad construct literature as both testimony and counter-archive: a form of witness that preserves what authoritarianism, war, and environmental devastation seek to erase.

Khalifa's depiction of Syria illustrates exile as a manifestation of internal decay: the homeland is transformed into an unfamiliar terrain characterized by surveillance and ideological repression, where displacement occurs even before any physical departure. Within this framework, a failed state is characterized by its methodical disintegration of the intimate spaces vital for maintaining cultural continuity (Rotberg 1-45). In El Akkad's depiction of America, the failure of the state is externally evidenced by pervasive displacement, internment, and radicalization. Sarat's evolution from a child to an insurgent exemplifies how political disintegration, climate catastrophe, and war extend exile globally, rendering the homeland uninhabitable.

The convergence resides in their mutual portrayal of exile as an enduring horizon rather than a transient disruption. For Khalifa, it is transmitted through silence and fear; for El Akkad, it is conveyed via the consequences of displacement and the radicalization it engenders. Both narratives reject the possibility of return, portraying exile as an existential condition in which memory serves as the only connection to a home that has either disappeared or was never accurately recalled (Said 179).

By examining this continuum, Khalifa and El Akkad establish literature as both a witness and a counter-archive, safeguarding what authoritarianism and war attempt to erase. Their works exhibit exile as a transgenerational and transnational phenomenon, necessitating ongoing renegotiation of belonging within and beyond the confines of failed states (Brah 195; Clifford 308).

7. Exile, Memory, and the Politics of Survival

> *"Where should we go after the last frontiers? Where should the birds fly after the last sky?"* (Darwish 9)

This section examines how each novel explores the psychological, cultural, and political landscapes of exile, whether under the oppressive stagnation of a homeland transformed into an alien environment or through the dynamic geographies of refugee camps and militarized borders (Khalifa 104; El Akkad 75). Employing postcolonial critique, failed state theory, and diaspora studies, the analysis reveals the ways in which memory and oblivion, alienation and defiance, hope and decay are negotiated within worlds intentionally constructed to diminish agency (Bhabha 56; Hall 234).

7.1 Diaspora, Displacement, and the Fracturing of Home

In *No Knives in the Kitchens of This City*, Khalifa depicts a state of internal exile: characters are physically anchored in Aleppo yet experience a profound sense of alienation from spaces that were once vibrant with communal activity. Surveillance mechanisms render the streets into areas fraught with suspicion, and traditional rituals diminish in significance. "The smells of spring conveyed nothing to my mother anymore" (Khalifa 163). The home, despite its physical proximity, becomes emotionally inaccessible, a condition influenced by authoritarian repression and the erosion of public trust (Creswell 42; Said 174).In contrast, American War depicts displacement as an external and absolute phenomenon. Sarat navigates landscapes devastated by climate change, internment camps, and regions lacking statehood, with her identity being reshaped through forced migration and ideological indoctrination. "In the camp, you lived by the charity of those who hated you" (El Akkad 75). Her circumstances attest to the mental toll of statelessness and the gradual process of political radicalization rooted in loss (Rotberg 1–45; Canavan).

In both narratives, exile is defined by existential separation. Stuart Hall's distinction between "roots" and "routes" elucidates how identity is reconfigured through rupture and migration (Hall 234). Even individuals who remain, such as Nizar in *No Knives*, undergo emotional dislocation, feeling alienated from both their location and their past (Khalifa 123). Likewise, Sarat's journey demonstrates that displacement does not conclude upon arrival; conflict perseveres, becoming ingrained within her psyche, whereby each new geographical setting transforms into another battleground in the same ongoing conflict (El Akkad 154; Tölölyan 14).

What distinguishes Khalifa's vision is the manner in which memory is diminished through self-censorship and subtle erasure. Exile manifests internally, experienced within the domestic sphere, where silence supplants speech and forgetting becomes a survival strategy (Brah 193; Khalifa 62). Conversely, El Akkad externalizes exile as movement and geopolitical abandonment, influenced by environmental deterioration and foreign intervention (El Akkad 76). Nevertheless, both texts converge in depicting diaspora as a state devoid of closure: the acts of remembering and forgetting are both burdensome, and the concept of home, whether lost, occupied, or imagined, remains elusive (Said 180; Bhabha 117).Literature, in this milieu, emerges as more than a witness. It becomes an affective archive, conserving the emotional and cultural residues of collapse. Through layered narratives, Khalifa and El Akkad document how exile fractures not just communities, but temporality itself: the past becomes a contested site of both refuge and peril (Trouillot 26; Ricoeur 71). In doing so, both authors assert the novel's role in upholding histories that states suppress, and in resisting the finality of dispossession (Clifford 311; Brah 195).

7.2 Memory, Forgetting, and Parallel Lives

In *No Knives in the Kitchens of This City*, memory is regarded as perilous. Under Baʿathist authoritarian rule, expressions of nostalgia are subject to censure, and the act of recalling the past may result in interrogation or enforced disappearance. As one character observes, "praising the past also meant cursing the present" (Khalifa 214). In response, individuals retreat into "parallel lives," psychological refuges constructed through selective amnesia, where longing is dulled and history is suspended. This coping mechanism functions as a defense against the state's monopoly over language and truth, aligning with Trouillot's assertion that silences in memory are not incidental but are politically constructed (Trouillot 26).

In American War, memory is not repressed but deliberately developed into a form of ideological capital. For Sarat, remembrance is intrinsically linked to grievance; narratives of loss serve as foundational elements for her radicalization. The death of her brother, Simon and her parents as well as her experiences at Camp Patience are not only traumatic events but are curated by individuals such as Albert Gaines, who direct remembrance towards acts of retribution. "The past is never just the past. It's the map of the future" (El Akkad 8). Here, memory is actively cultivated rather than passively inherited, transforming personal suffering into a political imperative (El Akkad 154; Rotberg 1-45).

This contrast becomes more pronounced in the depictions of Sawsan and Sarat. Sawsan selects forgetting as a psychological escape, severing connections to the compromised past and the expectations of resistance. Her act of erasure, however, does not denote indifference but rather a refusal to be drafted into inherited narratives of sacrifice (Khalifa 217). Conversely, Sarat employs memory as a weapon, grounding her identity in martyrdom and revenge. Their respective trajectories exemplify Trouillot's assertion that remembrance is inherently non-neutral; it reopens wounds even as it preserves dignity (Trouillot 26; Brah 195).

In both texts, memory is transgenerational, influenced by personal loss and political violence. In Khalifa's narrative, memory is fragmented by decades of silence; each generation inherits the trauma of the last but in broken form. In *American War*, memory is more coherent but also more dangerous; its clarity is engineered to sustain cycles of retribution. Gaines's manipulation of Sarat's past echoes postcolonial critiques of historical control as a method of domination, reframing memory as a colonial tool recast for internal warfare (Said 180; Bhabha 200).

In conclusion, both novels portray memory as an unreliable basis for the construction of identity. In Khalifa, forgetting may preserve the self but at the expense of history. In El Akkad, remembering may preserve the cause but at the expense of the self. Literature becomes the arena in which these tensions are negotiated, where characters, and by extension readers, are compelled to question whether remembrance engenders liberation or prolongs entrapment. In contexts where truth is selectively presented and history is subject to debate, memory serves as a delicate legacy. It possesses the potential to both anchor resistance and perpetuate violence (Clifford 311; Ricoeur 71).

7.3 Alienation and the Conditions of Defiance

In *No Knives in the Kitchens of This City*, alienation manifests as a psychological residue resulting from protracted authoritarian rule. It transcends mere separation from others and signifies a distortion of intimacy itself, wherein speech becomes dubious, love is overshadowed by fear, and memory must be domesticated for survival. The characters withdraw into curated silences and shadow selves, forging inner sanctuaries against a state that pervades familial, social, and emotional spheres. "Even the walls had stopped listening" (Khalifa 62), the narrator observes, encapsulating a society in which alienation becomes a condition of endurance. As Homi Bhabha contends, identity under oppression emerges within "in-between spaces" (Bhabha 56), and Khalifa's characters withstand by occupying this ambiguity, not through overt rebellion but by discreetly resisting the regime's totalizing narratives.

In contrast, American War portrays alienation as a crucible for militant transformation. Sarat's estrangement is characterized not by passive withdrawal but by radical reorientation. Her dispossession, intensified by internment, surveillance, and grief, engenders a new identity forged through violent resistance. A character warns her, "Hope is the cruelest weapon" (El Akkad 243), suggesting that alienation within the context of a failed state not only disrupts social cohesion but can also be manipulated as an ideological instrument. Unlike Khalifa's emotionally subdued acts of defiance, El Akkad depicts alienation as the fertile ground for insurgency, corroborating Robert Rotberg's assertion that failed governance fosters not only despair but also oppositional extremism (Rotberg 1-45).This divergence highlights the dual nature of alienation: in Khalifa's work, it serves as a strategy for psychological insulation, whereas in El Akkad's narrative, it functions as a catalyst for revolutionary transformation. The radicalization of Sarat exemplifies Frantz Fanon's assertion that colonized individuals, when dehumanized and silenced, may resort to violence as a means of reclaiming agency (Fanon 23). Her act of insurgency is not irrational but can be understood within a political framework where alienation equates to abandonment, and violence serves as the language of return. Conversely, Sawsan, while engaging in resistance, hesitates to fully commit to its demands, embodying the toll of living between visibility and erasure (Khalifa 217).

Postcolonial critique situates both models of alienation within broader histories of domination. Khalifa's characters survive by cultivating what James C. Scott terms "hidden transcripts" of resistance, coded expressions, furtive intimacies, and aesthetic gestures that subvert without provoking annihilation (Scott 33). El Akkad's characters, denied even these

marginal spaces, adopt confrontation. In both cases, alienation is inseparable from the structures that produce it: repressive regimes in one, collapsed states and humanitarian abandonment in the other.

Ultimately, alienation in these texts is not merely a symptom but rather a fundamental structural outcome. It represents the underlying matrix through which survival and resistance are negotiated when traditional political agency disintegrates. Whether expressed through art, silence, or insurgency, Khalifa and El Akkad demonstrate how alienation functions as a crucible: not as the antithesis of belonging but as its most unstable and contested form, where hope persists, if at all, through the fissures of failed states and fractured identities (Mbembe 12; Brah 194).

7.4 Death, Martyrdom, and the Reimagining of Life

In both *No Knives in the Kitchens of This City* and *American War*, death is reconceptualized as a political act rather than a terminal state. In Khalifa's depiction of Aleppo, mortality frequently signifies the last refuge of autonomy. Rashid's death (suicide), for example, is not depicted as an end but as a rejection of indignity, described as "a release from the daily violence of survival" (Khalifa 147). In a society where agency is diminished, death becomes the sole act remaining unclaimed by the state. As Paul Ricoeur observes, memory can serve as a form of resistance, and in this configuration, death functions similarly, as an escape from forgetting, albeit tragically final (Ricoeur 71; Said 180).

Conversely, within American War, death is integrated into the machinery of resistance. Mortality is interpreted through martyrdom, incorporated into the narrative of ideological continuity. Sarat's comrades do not merely perish; they transform into symbols; their deaths are repurposed to advance political narratives: "They died for something" (El Akkad 212). Nonetheless, El Akkad complicates this idealization: Sarat's act of vengeance exposes how politicized remembrance can sustain violence, ensnaring the living within inherited narratives of grievance (El Akkad 243; Rotberg 1-45).This contrast reveals the politics of death under state collapse. In Khalifa, death is intimate and elegiac, signaling a life so constrained that disappearance appears liberatory. In El Akkad, death is strategic, instrumentalized within a warfare logic that blurs resistance and retribution. Both models echo Achille Mbembe's necropolitics: the state, or its absence, orders life and death, not just who dies, but how death is lived, remembered, or weaponized (Mbembe 13).

In both novels, death does not signify the cessation of political existence; rather, it signifies its perpetuation through alternative means. During periods of authoritarian decline or wartime chaos, it emerges as the final means of protest or assertion of purpose. Whether experienced individually or collectively, tragic or mobilized, these deaths demonstrate how, in contexts deprived of civic optimism, even mortality is compelled to uphold political significance (Brah 195; Mbembe 13).

7.5 Social and Spiritual Decay

In both *No Knives in the Kitchens of This City* and *American War*, social and spiritual decay are delineated as systemic consequences of prolonged societal collapse, rather than accidental byproducts. In Khalifa's depiction of Aleppo, the recurring query, "Are there no knives in the kitchens of this city?" culminates in a man's act of destroying his own family; a rupture that signifies the ethical disintegration of a society formerly bound by communal norms (Khalifa 218). The moral fabric of the city has disintegrated; atrocity is no longer an anomaly but has become the prevailing atmosphere, aligning with Rotberg's assertion that failed states foster "an environment of fear and hopelessness" (Rotberg 1-45).

In *American War*, this collapse assumes a more militarized character. Children engaging in activities at checkpoints, families adapting to permanent displacement, and a society organized around survival rather than justice exemplify how militarization infiltrates daily life. Sarat's desensitization signifies a world where innocence cannot be conserved, and atrocity becomes normalized (El Akkad 119). The degradation is not solely infrastructural but also spiritual, reflecting a gradual erosion of empathy and moral judgment (Mbembe 12; Brah 195).

Khalifa's characters respond with strategies of containment and illusion. Nizar's fastidious gentility, the mother's descent into delusion, and Rashid's pursuit of martyrdom are all survival modes in a society where the social fabric has turned brittle (Khalifa 167). In El Akkad's narrative, spiritual decay is encoded in Sarat's transformation: her moral compass warps not through a single rupture but through slow, grinding betrayals, internment, surveillance, loss, until violence appears as the only intelligible ethic (El Akkad 212; Fanon 23).

Both novels illustrate that spiritual decline is evidenced by the normalization of harm and the internalization of hopelessness. In Khalifa, this is expressed through intimate disintegration, whereby professors exchange grades for sex, neighbors overlook public

beatings, and the mother's silence reflects the state's censorship (Khalifa 265). In El Akkad, spiritual erosion adheres to the principles of militarized pedagogy: hope becomes indistinguishable from vengeance, and resistance merges into the perpetuation of violence (El Akkad 212; Mbembe 12).

Postcolonial critique interprets these degradations not as cultural deficiencies but as consequences of prolonged domination. Whether through the quotidian humiliations of authoritarianism or the systemic dehumanization fostered by the war economy, both societies generate what Achille Mbembe describes as "death-worlds," wherein existence itself becomes diminished (Mbembe 13). Therefore, survival does not denote resilience; rather, it signifies adaptation to circumstances that undermine the fundamental essence of life's meaning.

7.6 Hope as Currency: The Ethics of Survival

Hope, in both *No Knives in the Kitchens of This City* and *American War*, is portrayed as an inherently transactional resource rather than a redemptive force. It is distributed unevenly, often cynically, across fractured political landscapes. In El Akkad's speculative future, hope functions as a controlled substance. Sarat discovers that survival depends not on ideals but on allegiances. She is told, "Hope is the cruelest weapon" (El Akkad 241), and her captors offer respite only in exchange for silence, confession, or complicity. What initially manifests as the aspiration to return gradually becomes a tool for vengeance. Her transformation does not signify a rejection of hope but its deliberate weaponization, perverted into an economy of deferred justice and ritualized pain (El Akkad 212; Fanon 38).

In Khalifa's Aleppo, hope persists not through overt rebellion but through aesthetic gestures and discreet refusals. Characters such as Nizar hold onto music, gentility, and remembrance as small yet defiant acts within an environment of suppression. These are not naive retreats but deliberate acts of disruption against a system that demands conformity and fear. As James C. Scott asserts, these "hidden transcripts" of resistance emerge in the margins, expressed through irony, mourning, and ritualized normalcy (Scott 33). Khalifa's work expresses endurance as a moral act: to live without surrendering to despair constitutes a form of resistance against the state's psychological occupation (Khalifa 187).

Both authors challenge the myth of triumphant resistance. Sarat's quest for retribution does not culminate in a liberated future; instead, it perpetuates a cycle of grief that is transmitted to future generations. Similarly, Khalifa's survivors do not reclaim their city; rather, they inherit

its devastation. The concept of "hope" becomes tenuous and even questionable, manifesting as a spectral presence that flickers in stolen music, silence, and the refusal to forget. As Bhabha notes, resistance under prolonged oppression often constitutes "a negotiation with death itself." (Bhabha 116).

Instead of presenting stories of moral clarity or heroic redemption, both novels suggest that resistance functions as an economy: it involves exchanges of memory, silence, vengeance, and the body. Within this economy, hope functions as an unstable currency, at times serving as a protective mechanism and at other times as a potential entrapment. Literature here does not simply serve as a witness; it critically examines the cost of survival and the ethics of belief amidst collapse (Brah 195; Ricoeur 86).

CONCLUSION

"In the memory of the oppressed, exile begins long before the border is crossed."
Mahmoud Darwish

To position Khalifa's No Knives in the Kitchens of This City in conversation with El Akkad's American War is to delineate a literary continuum of state disintegration and exile that spans across various geographies, temporalities, and genres. Through the application of postcolonial critique, failed-state theory, and diaspora studies, this chapter has contended that both novels elucidate not only the collapse of institutions but also the reconstruction of subjectivity, memory, and sense of belonging under conditions of significant stress (Said 180; Rotberg 1-45; Brah 195).

Khalifa's Syria manifests exile from within: identity diminishes through surveillance, fear, and the narrowing scope of possibility. Daily life becomes an act of containment, where even familial intimacy is vulnerable to disintegration (Khalifa 214). El Akkad's speculative vision of the future extends this condition outward: climate catastrophe and civil war make displacement a global issue, with survival dictated by borderlands, camps, and memory shaped as ideology. Sarat's transformation, influenced by the architecture of loss and indoctrination, demonstrates that subjectivity is not merely obliterated by violence but reconstructed through it (El Akkad 154; Rotberg 1-45).

However, these narratives do not solely document destruction. As literary counter-archives, they conserve the affective and ethical remnants of collapse, which Michel-Rolph

Trouillot refers to as "silences" inaccessible to official histories (Trouillot 26). Khalifa's subtle acts of resistance, including music, caretaking, and memory, reflect James C. Scott's concept of "hidden transcripts," which are discreet practices that endure beneath the spectacle of domination (Scott 33). El Akkad's narrative introduces complexity to remembrance by intertwining it with vengeance, illustrating how resistance may become compromised by the grief it seeks to preserve (El Akkad 243).

The juxtaposition of these texts necessitates a reevaluation of postcolonial inquiry, not as a framework limited to a specific geographic region, but as an epistemology responsive to dispersed and persistent manifestations of power, erasure, and survival (Said 54; Bhabha 56). In both instances, the figure of the displaced, whether internal or external, silenced or militant, exemplifies a global precarity influenced by failed governance, environmental degradation, and the fragmentation of belonging.

If hope is present within these narratives, it is neither utopian nor salvific. It is found in the endurance of testimony, the persistence of memory, and the ethical labor of survival within systems designed to deplete it (Ricoeur 71; Brah 195). As El Akkad articulates, "We tell these stories because the ruins can't speak for themselves" (El Akkad 287). By articulating what power seeks to erase, these novels do more than merely remember; they actively resist forgetting, thereby transforming literary narrative into a form of resistance itself.

In this light, both *No Knives in the Kitchens of This City* and *American War* underscore that exile is neither a historical aberration nor a solely postcolonial concern but an enduring condition of the modern world. The convergence of environmental catastrophe, authoritarian repression, and globalized displacement reflects a future in which the boundaries between "here" and "there," "home" and "away," collapse under shared precarity (Hall 234; Mbembe 14). Literature, by rendering these lived crises visible, not only bridges the temporal and spatial distance between Syria's present and America's imagined future but also compels a reckoning with the political and moral choices that will determine whether exile remains an inevitability or becomes averted history.

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CHAPTER 7

Reading Edward Said's Memoir Out of Place (1999) as a Diasporic Writing of Intellectual Exile

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines Edward Said's memoir *Out of Place* (1999) as a Diasporic autobiography that explores the intellectual life in exile. It investigates how Said's personal narrative intersects with cultural critique, portraying exile not simply as a physical displacement but as a realm of critical self-reflection shaped by colonial encounters and identity in flux. Drawing on Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of 'hybridity' and 'the third space from' *The Location of Culture* (1994), the chapter examines how Said navigates and negotiates the complexities of intellectual identity and belonging. It also engages with Said's own reflections on the exilic intellectual in *Representations of the intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lecture* (1994) and "Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals" (1993), highlighting how exile becomes a position of ethical and political engagement. Ultimately, the chapter argues that *Out of Place* presents exile as a generative space for reimagining identity beyond colonial and postcolonial binaries.

Keywords: Colonialism, culture, Diasporic authors, exile, Hybridity, identity.

INTRODUCTION

"I could not simply be the child of an Arab family, nor could I entirely be the product of western education. My identity was a blending of the two, a refusal of their separation." -(Said 16)

The figure of the exilic intellectual occupies a central position in colonial, postcolonial and Diasporic writings, intricately tied to the experiences of physical displacement, exile, alienation, and identity formation. This subject predominantly concerns nearly all those intellectuals who belonged to former colonized nations and who have undergone forced or voluntary exile due to various factors such as colonialism, racism, political violence and other oppressive structures within their countries of origin. Consequently, living in Diaspora has become a shared condition among many postcolonial authors. Edward Said exemplifies this condition, having spent much of his life away from his homeland. His writings recurrently engage with themes of exile, which are especially represented in his memoir *Out of Place* (1999). This chapter aims to analyze Said's memoir as a Diasporic narrative that articulates the intellectual experience of exile. It investigates the interplay between autobiography, intellectual exile, and cultural critique, drawing upon Homi K. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994) to frame the discussion. Additionally, the study aims to underscore the significance of hybrid identity in Said's work, by arguing that it offers new possibilities for reconceptualizing subjectivities beyond the constraints imposed by colonial discourses. In doing so, the memoir becomes not only a personal narrative but also a form of cultural and political critique.

1. An Introduction to the Context and Theory:

A critical and a textual analysis of Edward Said's *Out of Place* requires a contextual and theoretical grounding that accounts for the historical and ideological conditions underpinning the text. This section then outlines the enduring impacts of colonialism on formerly colonized societies, with particular emphasis on the patterns of both forced and voluntary displacement it engendered. As a consequence of these historical conditions, a rich body of a Diasporic literature and autobiographical writings has emerged, through which authors articulate their emotions, identities and critical perspectives. In this context, autobiography becomes a vehicle not only for personal reflection but also for cultural and political critique.

1.1 Historical Background

Numerous individuals experience forced displacement due to a range of complex and interrelated factors. Scholars have extensively examined the issue, emphasizing its deep and often detrimental impacts on both individuals and societies. In "Refugee and Human Displacement in Contemporary International Relations: Reconciling State and Individual Sovereignty," Gary G. Troller states that mass involuntary migration frequently arises "as a consequence of armed conflict, persecution, and widespread human rights abuse" (50). This suggests that wars, systemic oppression, political violence and various forms of discrimination are significant factors behind forced migration. Furthermore, historical and structural forces such as colonialism have also played a critical role in displacing populations. As Pedersen et al. explain, colonial rule not only disrupted indigenous societies but also imposed conditions that forced many to flee in search of safety and survival (97). Collectively, these perspectives highlight that forced displacement or exile is not merely a result of contemporary political crises but is also deeply rooted in historical injustices and global power dynamics.

In her article "Forced Displacement in History: Some Recent Research," Sascha O. Becker examines the global phenomenon of mass migration, emphasizing that millions of individuals have been forced to leave their homelands due to their ethnic, racial, or religious identities (3). She argues that such forced displacement frequently arises from the actions of dominant groups who expel marginalized populations from their cities or countries, stripping them of the right to remain in their place of origin. This expulsion may be either temporary or permanent, as those displaced people often face uncertainty regarding the duration or conditions of their stay in host countries. Becker explains that the involuntary nature of this migration can result in significant emotional and psychological harm. As she explains, "forced migration can have distinct consequences on the migrants themselves because of the forceful nature of displacement experience as well as the loss of possessions and homes against their own will" (3). Displaced individuals face not only the trauma of leaving their homeland but also the additional burden of losing their homes, belongings, and sense of stability. These frequently result in feelings of alienation, grief, pain and instability, which can affect migrants long after their initial relocation.

Building upon these ideas, several postcolonial theorists examine the intricate relationship between colonialism with forced displacement, highlighting how imperial systems often engender both physical and psychological dislocation. Ahmed Taha Fathey Hassan, for

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example, argues that colonialism not only precipitates displacement but also destabilizes individual identity. He points to the Palestinian experience as a poignant case, asserting that "the displacement of Palestinians is a good example, reflecting the suffering and pain which they confront once they are forced to immigrate or abandon their homeland" (Hassan 15). As a result of colonial occupation and ongoing political oppression, Palestinians have been displaced across many regions, including Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, and the United States. This dislocation has left many grappling with profound emotional turmoil and a lingering sense of loss. The personal experiences of prominent figures such as Edward Said, who, along with his family, was forced to migrate from Palestine to Egypt demonstrate how such displacement can shape one's worldview, identity, and intellectual pursuits. In response to these traumas, many displaced individuals have turned to literature and autobiographical writing as a means of portraying their experiences and asserting their voices in the face of historical erasure.

1.2 Diasporic Writings

The term *Diaspora* has played a pivotal role in contemporary cultural, literary, and sociopolitical discourse, particularly concerning the displacement of populations across national borders. Though the term is modern in its critical usage, it conveys enduring experiences of involuntary migration, exile, and identity reconstruction. Vijay Agnew defines Diaspora as "the scattering and dissipation of groups of people or communities from their countries to peripheral places" due to war, genocide, or political exile (193). Diaspora refers not merely to physical dislocation but also an ongoing condition marked by emotional, cultural, and psychological rupture. Individuals who experience Diaspora often endure a profound sense of loss and alienation, as their attachment to homeland remains unresolved. Robin Cohen elaborates on this condition by describing Diaspora as "a collective trauma, a banishment, where one dreamed of home and lived in exile" (ix). These reflections underscore that Diasporic existence is inherently linked to historical trauma and the persistent longing for return—whether real or imagined.

Within this broader framework, the Arab Diaspora emerges as a particularly significant field of scholarly inquiry. Zahia Smail Salhi, in her foundational study *Introduction: Defining the Arab Diaspora*, characterizes Arab displacement as a movement often precipitated by colonialism, war, and civil unrest. Salhi asserts that for many Arabs, the host country becomes "the house of exile," a site of forced resettlement rather than voluntary migration (1). She explains that the Arabic term *shatāt*, denoting dispersal or scattering, captures the lived

experience of many displaced Arabs—most notably Palestinians, whose current condition frequently entails "the extent of Palestinian settlement outside Palestine" (2). This widespread dispersion has led to the emergence of a distinct literary tradition rooted in exile, in which Arab authors— writing in Arabic, English, or French— articulate their experiences of war, migration, and cultural fragmentation. According to Salhi, such literature constitutes a "hybrid" form that reflects both the cultural heritage of the homeland and the influences of the host country. For her, Diasporic narratives,

As such it might rightly bear the epithet of a 'hybrid literature' which bears marks of both the writers' country of origin and their host country. It also is a space where both home and host cultures converge, intersect, and even clash, resulting in a third culture, which situates in a third space which is that of Diaspora. (Salhi 3- 4)

Through this lens, Arab Diasporic literature becomes not only a mode of cultural expression but also a site of negotiation between belonging and estrangement. One of the most influential figures in Arab Diasporic discourse is Edward Said. Through his theoretical and autobiographical works Said vividly exemplifies the intellectual struggles and creative potential of exile. Said's writings such as *Out of Place*, *Representations of the Intellectual*, and "Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals" to cite but a few, epitomize what may be called a Diasporic consciousness: a mode of thought shaped by geographic displacement, cultural Hybridity, and political marginality. In addition, Said works also interrogate the Western representations of the East and the personal ramifications of exile, offering a complex account of identity formation under conditions of forced exile. Salhi notes that such authors not only reflect on their personal suffering but also attempt to bridge cultural divides by communicating their experiences to audiences in the host society (3). In doing so, they position themselves as cultural mediators who negotiate the tensions between homeland nostalgia and Diasporic reinvention.

Moreover, contemporary Arab Diasporic writers continue to engage with themes of marginality, alienation, cultural identity, and political resistance. Their knowledge as well as their literature is shaped by a desire to reclaim voice and agency in the face of systemic disempowerment. As Shahla Ujayli contends, these writers possess a unique "knowledge of numerous topics, especially culture, society and language," which they channel into their works to articulate alternative visions of reality (91). For Ujayli, Diasporic writing in general and Arab Diasporic literature in particular enable authors to move "from the margin to the center and

position of power," through the construction of texts that reflect their subjective truths (91). Within this intellectual trajectory, Edward Said is an emblematic figure. Drawing upon his linguistic dexterity, academic authority, and deep-rooted cultural affiliations, Said uses the essay form as a means of writing for exploring the pain and challenges of exile. As Mustapha Ben T. Marrouchi observes, "A displaced Palestinian who is attached by all his roots to an Arabic people and culture, Edward Said selected the essay form... to express the pain of exile" (63). Yet Said's intellectual contributions extend beyond the essay form, to include memoirs, lectures, critical texts and theories that collectively constitute or forge a dynamic portrait of the intellectual in exile; a figure who critiques dominant narratives while asserting the legitimacy of Diasporic existence.

1.3 Homi Bhabha's Definition of "Hybridity" and "Third Space"

To thoroughly analyze Edward Said's *Out of Place*, it is of importance to understand first the theoretical frameworks of cultural "Hybridity" and the "Third Space", as conceptualized by Homi K. Bhabha and Peter Jackson. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha sees "Hybridity" as that "moment of transit," which refers to an individual's experience of displacement and confusion when situated between multiple cultural identities. He asserts that such moments prompt the individual to a reevaluation of one's selfhood, where one feels simultaneously "here and there," "inside and outside," and experiences both "inclusion and exclusion" (Bhabha 1). This in-betweenness, and being here and there according to Bhabha, generates a profound sense of disturbance as individuals navigate between cultures, cross nations, and traditions. Similarly, Peter Jackson, in "Geographies of Diversity and Difference," contends that "Hybridity" is "a contested term, implying the mingling of two formerly separate 'stocks,' and not all such forms of cultural mixing are inherently progressive" (Jackson 319). This suggests that hybrid identities emerge particularly when individuals cross or challenge cultural boundaries, moving beyond strict adherence to one cultural framework. Bhabha emphasizes this transformative space as the "Third Space," wherein "the primary elements and signs of culture challenge 'unity,' as they can be reinterpreted based on the context" (Bhabha 208).

Although "Hybridity" may provide a foundation for cultural redefinition, Bhabha also acknowledges the internal conflicts that accompany this process. In *The Location of Culture*, he emphasizes the productive potential of these "in-between" moments, and calls it as the "Third Space" noting that:

The focus [should be] on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain of elaborating strategies of selfhood-singular or communal-that initiate new signs of identity and innovation, innovative sites of collaboration, and contesting, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (Bhabha 1–2)

From the above excerpt, it is made clear that for Bhabha, the "Third Space" should not be perceived as a void or an empty space, but rather he redefines it as an active and creative site. In other words, the "Third Space" becomes a productive layout for identity negotiation and cultural exchange, enabling individuals to discover their sense of self and to engage with "nationality, community interest and cultural value" (Bhabha 2).

2. Discussion

2.1 The Relationship between the Exilic Intellectual, Cultural Hybridity, Third Space, and Mimicry in *Out of Place*

Out of Place (1999): A Memoir is regarded as Edward Said's personal account that chronicles his personal life-experience of forced relocation and upbringing in Egypt, Lebanon and America. By chronicling his life across Palestine, Egypt, Lebanon, and the United States, Said explores the psychological and emotional pains of being dislocated from his native land. He states, "To me, nothing was more painful and paradoxically sought after characterizes my life than the many displacements from countries, cities, abodes, languages, environments that have kept in motion all these years" (217). This statement reflects not only Said's personal grief but also the wider political sentiment and cultural dislocations that Palestinians and other Diasporic communities endure. However, Said's memoir transcends the label of a simple biographical writing, as it reaches the scope of a powerful lens through which to examine involuntary migration, exile, and the reconstruction of identity in foreign lands, notably in the United States. Moreover, the memoir provides profound insights into the intellectual's complex position as one who constantly negotiates and navigates between multiple worlds and crossing various cultural boarders.

In the light of Bhabha's theory, *Out of Place* offers a profound narrative account of exile, displacement, and identity, by illuminating the concept of cultural hybridity. This memoir underscores the complexity of negotiating a selfhood that is not anchored or situated in a

singular cultural or national identity but rather shaped by several geographies, languages, and ideologies. Said's life journey from Palestine to Egypt, then Lebanon, and ultimately the United States unfolds as a process of constant relocation and identity negotiation. These experiences not only shaped his intellectual affiliations but also gave rise to a deeply hybrid sense of Said's self. To illustrate, Said recounts that, in Cairo, his classmates perceived him as a stranger due to his Palestinian origin. Similarly, in Lebanon, he was alienated from his peers owing to his exilic status. It was only in the United States, after reaching intellectual maturity that he began to comprehend and articulate the Hybrid nature of his identity. He argues, "I could not simply be the child of an Arab family, nor could I entirely be the product of Western education. My identity was a blending of the two, a refusal of their separation" (Said 33). This quote reveals clearly the tension between cultural heritage and imposed assimilation. Said's use of the word "refusal" is particularly powerful, as it signals his resistance to cultural compartmentalization and suggests that identity is not a fixed entity but an evolving process.

Furthermore, and from the outset of the memoir, Said reveals the deep-seated fragments of his identity. He recounts, "With an unexceptionally Arab name like Said connected to an improbably English first name (my mother very much liked it and liked even more the prestige of having her son bear it), I was an uncomfortably anomalous student" (3). His hybrid name symbolizes his cultural duality and internal conflict, reflecting the postcolonial condition of being caught between the colonizer and the colonized. In the same vein, Robert J.C. Young aptly remarks that "Hybridity is the name of the displacement of the colonizer's narratives of origin and purity by the colonial subject's refusal to be either the same as or different from the colonizer" (Young 25). Said's ambiguous cultural and linguistic identity exemplifies this rejection of binary definitions, revealing a deeper complexity in postcolonial identity formation.

Said elaborates also on his ambiguous identity in his other writings. For example, in *Representations of the Intellectual*: *The 1993 Reith Lecture*, he describes exile as a space that allows for double vision, stating that it "allowed him to exist in a 'median state' that is neither fully at home in the past nor in the present" (Said 186). *Out of Place* is permeated by this double vision, particularly through the tension Said experiences with language. He associates Arabic with "Home, family, warmth" and English with "school, discipline and exile" (56). Interestingly however, this linguistic duality represents what Young terms "interlingual space(s)," where the instability of language reflects the instability of identity (Young 334). Said's sense of self thus becomes a site of fragmentation, embodying the linguistic and cultural tensions that define the postcolonial subject.

As illustrated in the memoir, Said's exilic attitude overlaps between two cultural heritages: his native Arab (Palestinian), culture and origins as well as the western new acquired culture. This state of in-betweenness enabled him to transcend the tropes and constraints of both cultures, allowing him to critically reflect upon and occasionally subvert the shades of colonial power, thereby challenging the old established norms on identity fixity. Echoing Bhabha's assertion that "Hybridity" occupies a position capable of subverting dominant cultural narratives and structure, because "it presents the subversive, transformative power of the margins, the intersection of histories and identity that destabilizes conventional notions of culture" (Bhabha 112). Said's role as an exilic intellectual becomes productive in this regard. For, his intellectual exile facilitated his emergence as a productive and a prominently engaged thinker. He actively participated in reconstructing a new Diasporic identity informed by multiple heritages. Occupying this role and responsibility elevated him to the status of a scholar, theoretician and thinker, who boldly dared to criticize Colonialism, Orientalism, Imperialism, and power structures. Thus, through "Hybridity", Said constructs an identity that is complex, fluid, and capable of contesting rigid cultural boundaries and constraints. This confirms Bhabha's position on the fact that "the cultural diversity that Hybridity presents is a dynamic and pluralizing force, not a fixed, essential tradition" (Bhabha 39).

However, to fully apprehend the implications of Said's hybrid identity, one must consider the theoretical lens offered by Homi K. Bhabha. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha focuses on the postcolonial condition as a site of cultural negotiation and Hybridity. He contends that colonial and postcolonial subjects inhabit what he terms the "Third Space," a liminal site where identity is not fixed but constantly reconstituted through negotiation between multiple cultural positions. According to Bhabha, "the migrant is always a 'blending' of various forms of life, not a process of neat separation" (113). Said's experiences outside his homeland exemplify this phenomenon. As an exilic intellectual, he embodies the "Third Space," constantly maneuvering between cultures without full belonging to either. Said writes, "I felt completely part of any place, even when I was supposed to be 'home' in Cairo, or at school in America […] I was always a foreigner, a stranger, a displaced […] I was a stranger to my own heritage and yet immersed in the heritage of another place" (Said 49). This expression of "unhomeliness," a term Bhabha also employs, reinforces the notion of the hybrid self; one that is fragmented, deterritorialized, and perpetually in transition.

As a result, Said experiences a form of cultural Hybridity by inhabiting what Homi Bhabha calls the "Third Space." The latter, according to Shadi A. Neimneh and Halla A.

Shureteh in their article entitled "Edward Said's Memoir Out of Place: Postcolonial Tenets, Dissonant Voices, and Divided Loyalties", is described as "unhomely," which is deeply marked by feelings of displacement, alienation and moments of estrangement. They argue,

Throughout his life, Said lived this state of conflict of being torn between dissonant language, cities, religions, and cultures. He felt that his identity was one in a state of being transience, and that he was out of place, a fact evidenced by his constant need to travel. He never felt fully at home in America or related to the vague, difficult past of his childhood. Exile, insecurity, and identity problems form the cultural crux of the memoir. (Neimneh and Shureteh 20)

The above excerpt unveils that Said wrote his memoir to reflect on his experience of exile, displacement, and identity crisis. Hence, this also delves into the sentiment of being "out of place" and estranged from one's homeland. Therefore, this sense of unrootedness underscores Said's continual struggle with identity and belonging. As Qabaha notes, his experiences "are tied to childhood memories, history, family, and identity crisis" (Qabaha 1065). His exilic journey is thus both a personal and political exploration of selfhood and cultural memory.

In *Out of Place*, Said sheds light to his personal experiences of exile, although accompanied by pain and occasional alienation, paradoxically serve as a source of intellectual liberation. His estrangement from fixed cultural identities allowed him to critique various forms of power and resist Arab monolithic nationalism and colonial narratives. In this context, he notes,

My *search for freedom*, *for the self* beneath or obscured by "Edward," *could only have begun because of that rupture*, so I have come to think of it as fortunate, despite the loneliness and unhappiness I experienced for so long. Now it does not seem important or even desirable to be "right" and in place (right at home, for instance). Better to wander out of place, not to own a house, and not ever to feel too much at home anywhere, especially in a city like New York, where I shall be until I die (emphasis added 294) . This passage illustrates the transformation of displacement into agency, as Said reclaims his marginality and turns it into a site of resistance and freedom. In fact, the intellectual productivity that emerged from Said's liminal position- third space- is a direct outcome of his capacity to navigate across cultural and ideological frameworks. As he poignantly affirms, "I learned that the world I was living in had been shaped by colonialism and imperialism. It was only when I moved between those different intellectual

spaces—between Arab nationalism, Western education, and my Palestinian roots—that I could begin [to] understand the larger context of my existence" (112).

This statement not only emphasizes the importance of the "third space" as a site of critical awareness but also highlights Said's refusal to conform to monolithic identities. He repeatedly asserts that, "I could not be part of the nationalism that defined Palestinians in a monolithic way, as I was a product of a hybrid identity formed in exile. My intellectual resistance lay in my ability to critique both colonialism and nationalism in ways that did not align with either" (Said 363). In this regard, Said's self-positioning within the in-between space becomes a form of subversion and intellectual rebellion.

Language and linguistic hybridity are also pivotal factors in the shaping of Said's exilic identity. Language functions both as a medium of communication and as a significant marker of cultural affiliation, yet it simultaneously represents a site of tension for the exiled intellectuals. Said's linguistic journey, rooted in Arabic but increasingly dominated by English and French, reveals the ambivalence of language in postcolonial contexts. On the one hand, language facilitates access and belonging, on the other, it serves as a mechanism of exclusion and expulsion. In *Out of Place*, Said observes:"My language was neither completely Arabic, nor fully English, both languages, however, important [….] learned to speak English very well in the American school, and from then on, I would be cut off from Arabic and everything in Palestine. In a sense, it was not a question of learning English, but of learning how to live in the world in the language of others" (18–19).

The above passage is structurally and thematically significant as it reflects Said's opinion on language. The pause indicated by the ellipsis signals a moment of hesitation, a facture in expression mirroring the fracture in identity. The juxtaposition between "cut off" and "important" shows the tension between gain and loss. In other words, English offers him intellectual empowerment, but at the cost of severing him from his Arabic tongue and, symbolically from his native cultural context, which is Palestine.

From Bhabha's perspective, this linguistic hybridity reflects another dimension of the "Third Space," where colonial languages are re-appropriated by postcolonial subjects through processes of mimicry, distortion, and hybrid usage. The exilic writer, such as Said, does not merely adopt the colonizer's language but transforms it into a medium of resistance. The interplay between Arabic and English in Said's life becomes emblematic of a broader

postcolonial strategy, where language itself is a terrain of struggle and identity formation. Thus, Said's bilingualism and linguistic negotiation further underscore the ambivalence of his identity-a condition both imposed by and resistant to colonial structures.

In summary, Edward Said's *Out of Place* serves as a testament to the productive tensions inherent in exile and hybridity. Through the theoretical framework of Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of "Hybridity" and the "Third Space," one can gain deeper understanding of Said's construction of identity as a negotiation between cultural dichotomies rather than a fixed, coherent self. His experiences of geographical, linguistic, and cultural displacement enabled him to transcend and at the same time resist essentialist ideologies, thereby establishing a critical, intellectual stance. Therefore, Said's memoir is not merely a personal account of alienation or marginalization but a powerful assertion of how exile, far from being a solely disempowering condition, can foster critical consciousness and intellectual freedom.

2.2 Edward Said's Notion of the Exilic Intellectual in his other Writings

In alignment with *Out of Place*, Said's other writings, such as his essay "Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals," portray exile not solely as a geographic dislocation but as a deeply psychological and cultural condition that shapes the intellectual's identity and critical perspective. He characterizes exile as "a cruel punishment" (113), emphasizing its involuntary nature and the emotional burden it inflicts on displaced individuals by political forces, war, or persecution. Said situates this experience within a historical axis, noting the increase in forced migrations following the Second World War (1938-1945), which collapsed with the creation of new nation-states like Pakistan and Israel, resulting in communities of "oppressed minorities" who continue to live with the trauma of dislocation (115).

Said's understanding of exile is not limited to physical displacement bur also involves a perpetual state of in-betweenness. He writes, "The exile therefore exists in the median state, neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old" (114). This description foregrounds the exilic intellectual's liminal position-caught between two worlds, two cultural affiliations, and two temporalities. The statements "half involvements and half detachments" reflects the internal fragmentation and ambivalence that characterize this condition. Exiles are, on one hand, "nostalgic and sentimental," emotionally tethered to a lost homeland, while on the other, they become "adept mimics" or "secret casts," individuals who learn to navigate, blend into, or even subvert their host cultures through adaptation or

concealment. Hence, these exiled individuals are persistently reminded of their involuntary migration and memories of their homeland,

The exile therefore exists in the median state, neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with the half involvements and half detachments, nostalgic and sentimental on one level, an adept mimic or a secret cast on another. Being skilled at survival becomes too comfortable and secure constituting a threat that is constantly to be guarded against. (114)

What Said outlines here is not only the alienation of exile but also its paradoxical empowerment. The exilic intellectual, by virtue of their marginal position, gains a critical distance from dominant ideologies and nationalistic narratives. However, this critical position is not without risk. Said warns that the exile's survival mechanisms of mimicry, adaptability, and self-preservation can become "too comfortable and secure," potentially dulling the edge of their critical awareness. Survival, then, becomes a discipline, a mode of existence that must be "constantly guarded against" lest it undermine the very critical consciousness that exile makes possible (114).

As long as the notion of exilic intellectual is concerned, Said devoted a series of lectures and articles on the subject. In *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lecture*, Said celebrates the concept of exile, asserting that intellectuals should embrace it because of its various privileges (39). The exilic intellectual focuses on both sciences and liberty. In this sense, Said argues, in "Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals," that "An intellectual is fundamentally concerned with knowledge and freedom" (121). Said's statement highlights the intellectual's active role within society. Rather than being a passive observer and in the margins, the intellectual should participate in the pursuit of truth and the defense human freedom.

Said defines also the roles of an exilic intellectual in his writings. In "Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals" for instance, Said explains the main vocation of an exilic intellectual. This individual is characterized as a "nay-sayer" who experiences conflict with his society due to a pervasive sense of being an outsider. Said depicts the condition as "the state of being fully adjusted, always feeling outside the chatty, familiar world inhabited by natives" (117). The exilic intellectual remains an outsider because of the continuous restlessness, which renders them "unsettled and unsettling others" (117). As a result, an exilic intellectual believes that he is an outsider because of his ability to oppose and unsettle others. In *The Representations*

of the Intellectual, Said addresses an exilic intellectual who has "the audacity of daring, and to representing change, to moving on" (47). This entails that exile is crucial for him, as he possesses the potential to empower others through his writings, speeches, or interviews. Said is an exilic intellectual, as his feelings of exile and 'out of place' in Egypt and the USA influenced his critical thinking, and attitudes on various issues concerning the Arab and Western worlds.

The exilic intellectual cannot fully assimilate as a citizen of the host nation because he remains unable to forget his sense of origin and the accompanying feelings of displacement and loss. He argues that an "intellectual is like a shipwrecked person who learns how to live in a certain sense *with* the land" (44). This statement indicates that a sense of exile is essential for an intellectual, as it enables him to acquire knowledge and adapt to a new nation. It is enlightening for him as long as he feels liberated and learns lessons from his own experiences. He is distinguished by a feeling of happiness derived from his diverse experiences. In this context, in "Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals," Said writes, "the intellectual as exile tends to be happy with unhappiness" (117). Although he is considered a "marginal figure", this status is advantageous due to the privileges it affords him (Said 117).

More importantly, Said defines the main vocations of the exilic intellectual, especially possessing the power to convey his ideas, attitudes, and philosophy to a broad audience. In his Reith lectures, he argues that he has to "denounce corruption, defend the weak, defy imperfect or oppressive authority" (5). He adds, "[f]or the intellectual the task, I believe, is explicitly to universalize the crisis, to give greater human scope to what a particular race or nation suffered, to associate that experience with the sufferings of others" (33). This means that his main objective is to question established conventions and possess the will to disrupt and challenge the "dominant norms" associated to other nations (Said 27). The intellectual can voice to the concerns of the oppressed and marginalized people in different regions. In this context, Sabry Hafez asserts that Said gained prominence in the Arab world after the publication of *Orientalism* and his subsequent books, as they deconstruct Western colonial discourses (81). As an exilic intellectual, Said has produced different writings such as *Orientalism*, *Politics of dispossession: Struggle for Palestinian self-determination 1969-1994*, and *Covering Islam*.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, a significant number of individuals have been forcibly relocated to various regions worldwide due to civil wars and colonial occupations. Hence, some of these individuals

authored literary texts and autobiographies that recount their experiences and sentiments as displaced persons. This chapter, therefore, examined Edward Said's *Out of Place* as a Diasporic autobiography that explored his life in exile. The memoir investigated Said's physical and psychological displacement, emphasizing his obstacles and emotional distress. It described his feelings of being "out of place" and uprooted in the United States, as he grappled with his dual Arabic-Western name, identity crisis, and the languages he used. Indeed, this liminal space allowed Said to negotiate his complex exilic intellectual identity, navigating between different worlds, cultures, and languages. This suggests that his feeling of hybridity and in-betweenness positively influenced Said, enabling him to articulate his beliefs, emerge as an intellectual, and transcend the limitations imposed by colonialism. This also facilitated writing on the primary roles of an exilic intellectual in *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Lectures* and "Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals". As an exilic intellectual, Said embraced being "out of place" and lived within the host country. He became one of the polymaths of the twentieth century, who could speak truth and defend marginalized communities.

Building this study on the analysis of Edward Said's Diasporic and exilic identity, future researches could be extended to the exploration of other aspects of the autobiography by comparing it with other autobiographical and semi-autobiographical writings. These studies could include a comparative analysis of Edward Sid with other exilic intellectuals and figures such as Assia Djebar, Ngugui wa Thiong'o, revealing common themes of cultural dislocation, linguistic tension and the enduring legacy of colonial history.

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PART FOUR

The Black Atlantic and the Redefinition of Home

CHAPTER 8

Locating the Mythical Home in the Black Diasporic Imaginary: *Water as a Source of Trauma and Healing*

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ABSTRACT

Diasporic trajectories shaped the identities and the different borders of nationhood and culture in the twentieth century and urged scholars to revisit the essentialism that structured them for centuries. They explore how the diaspora space invited authors to negotiate identity and belonging across political, socio-cultural and psychic borders (Brah). This chapter demonstrates how the motif of water is frequently used as a trope of transformation and change in the Black diasporic imagination. By emphasizing its duality in representing trauma and healing, the diasporic subject is deeply concerned with the pathways of the Middle Passage and the state of wandering. Grounded in the theoretical framework of the Black Atlantic (Gilroy), cultural identity (Hall) and the aquatic interpretation (Dawson; Murray), the study examines how rivers, oceans and other aquatic imagery function as a site of negotiation where the boundaries of identity, history and culture are negotiated and reconfigured. By taking poetry and the novel as a case study in two different contexts, it is important to trace the evolution of the water motif in the works of two generations of Black writers from British and American traditions. It includes Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou, Caryl Phillips, Bernardine Evaristo, and Ya Gyasi. Through a critical oceanic approach, this chapter explores the evolution of water as a metaphor in the selected works. Hughes's "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" and Angelou's "Still I Rise" employ the imagery of water as a source of poetic advocacy, resilience and ancestral continuity

in the face of racism and emotional displacement. On the other hand, the diasporic novel in the first decades of the twenty-first century, Phillips's *A Distant Shore*, hints at the Atlantic as a "watery grave" and a mythical home for the diasporic subject, whereas Evaristo's *Soul Tourists* presents the ocean and the sea as a space of cultural renewal and rebirth. This also culminates in the debut novel of Ya Gyasi, *Homegoing,* where water is considered not only an intergenerational source of trauma, but also a potential for healing and self-reconciliation.

INTRODUCTION

Black diasporic writing is haunted by the presence of water imagery. It is considered a recurrent motif that carries the traumatic loads of stories animated by the themes of dispersion and belonging. Whether implicitly or explicitly, numerous diasporic writers of African origin have emphasized how the Middle Passage, as a maritime route of displacement, shaped the collective memory of Black people and informed their identities across different centuries (Gilroy; Dawson; Boehmer; Phillips). Literature as a symbolic realm is the blueprint for articulating different stances in various contexts and water is deemed an active signifier and a source of deep trauma and potential healing. As a trope, it echoes trauma, anxiety and ambivalence inherited from the transatlantic journeys and the violence of displacement and separation that each diasporic writer should attend to in order to challenge the traumatic burden of being a diasporic Black subject. Black authors have relied on the imagery of water across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to address the question of diasporic "anchor" and excavate the traumatic memories that informed their subjectivities. From verse to prose and from Harlem to London, the water motif straddles geographic spaces and generations and connects the destiny of Blackness to the diasporic Atlantic space.

Many Black poems and diasporic novels attempted to reconfigure the nation-state boundaries and national identities by recalibrating the national stories from the near history. The twentieth-century African American fiction was animated by various Black tropes that spoke to racial discrimination and oppression. The Harlem Renaissance was the spark that released Black committed art that was associated with self-assertion, resilience and entertainment (Murray 277). The poetic muse of asserting Blackness within the American boundaries continued to be amplified by remarkable African American authors such as Maya Angelou, Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker, among others, in the second half of the twentieth century. Different stories from a male and female Black perspective revisited American history as well as reclaimed the African American identity.

In a similar vein, British literature witnessed Black diasporic tropes that articulated the presence of Afro-Caribbean immigrants during the aftermath of the Second World War. The journey of the Windrush Empire across the Atlantic to Britain not only informed the Black British identity but also acted as a kind of reminder of how Atlantic trajectories echoed the destiny of Blackness as it has been (re)constructed between Africa, America, and Europe (Hall). Many authors from the Windrush generations have narrated the stories of how these diasporic routes reconfigured the British roots. Many literary works, such as Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* and George Lamming's *The Emigrants*, Andrea Levy's *Small Island,* among other novels, have emphasized how sites of diasporic memory are informed by the act of border crossing, where water as a trope and the ship as a chronotope subvert the nation-state-based stories of essentialist identities and racial boundaries.

This chapter aims to explore how the motif of water has frequently been used as a trope of transformation in the Black diasporic imaginary. Captivated by its fluidity and malleability, the symbolic waterscape creates the enigmatic nature of the diaspora space that repositions Black subjectivities/narratives as they interact with the mystic shades of the distant and near history (Dawson 1-10; Murray 277-291). As a site of contestation, it invites authors to negotiate identity and belonging across political, socio-cultural and psychic borders. By relying on a critical oceanic approach, I argue that both African American fiction and Black British literature embody the dualistic imagery of water as a source of trauma and healing for the Black diasporic psyche. Grounded in the theoretical framework of the Black Atlantic (Gilroy) and cultural identity (Hall), the study examines how rivers, oceans and other aquatic imagery function as a site of negotiation where the boundaries of identity, history and culture are contested and reconfigured. By taking poetry and the diasporic novel as a case study in two different but important contexts in Black history, it is important to trace the evolution of the water motif in the literary works of two generations of Black writers from American and British traditions. It includes potential authors that shaped the landscape of Black diasporic literature, such as Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou, Caryl Phillips, Bernardine Evaristo, and Ya Gyasi. It is important to examine how Hughes' "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" and Angelou's "Still I Rise" employ the imagery of water as a source of poetic advocacy, resilience and ancestral continuity in the face of racism and emotional displacement. On the other hand, Phillips's *A Distant Shore* hints at the Atlantic as a "watery grave" for the diasporic subject, whereas Evaristo's *Soul Tourists* presents the ocean and the sea as a space of cultural renewal and rebirth. This also

culminates in the debut novel of Yaa Gyasi, *Homegoing*, where water is considered not only an intergenerational source of trauma, but also a potential for healing and self-reconciliation.

1. Self-assertion and Resilience in The Twentieth-Century Black Poetry

The beginning of the twentieth century was crucial for the formation of Black poetry due to the need for dealing with the quest for identity and addressing political and cultural representation regarding Blackness in the USA and Britain. Huggins has pointed out: "For it appears that in the decade of the 1920s, the Afro-American came of age; he became self-assertive and racially conscious as if for the first time" (3). For the African American authors, the first decades were characterized by moments of Black rise as myriad prominent authors such as Du Bois, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Maya Angelou, among others, were captivated by the legacy of slavery, racial segregation, oppression and institutionalized racism. Literature was considered a potential space for asserting their Black identity and demonstrating tropes of resilience and resistance to the dominant white oppressive structures that aimed to silence them. The trope of newness was associated with the Afro-American subject as he came to terms with his double consciousness and managed to navigate the boundaries of his identity by calling for empowerment, agency and enacting exclusion. In 1920, Harlem witnessed the Black rise as the period of renaissance marked the beginning of a new era where art not only became a means of entertainment, but rather a source of advocacy and innovation for celebrating Blackness and claiming agency within the American boundaries. It also had an impact beyond America and it inspired many Black diasporic authors of Afro-Caribbean origins to challenge boundaries of British and demonstrated the needed resilience to do so.

In the same vein, Black writers in Britain were urged to challenge questions of identity regarding the legacy of colonialism, the British Empire and immigration. Black diasporic authors such as Sam Selvon, Buchi Emecheta, Grace Nichols and Paul Gilroy navigated the alienating process of living in the metropole and the anxiety derived from the dilemma of (un)belonging. Until the second half of the twentieth century, Black British authors followed the trajectory of their concomitant American African authors and used literature to advocate for revising history and reconstituting British identity. Several literary works have embodied the themes of self-assertion and resilience against the status quo. By relying on the oceanic approach introduced above and the close reading technique, it is important to explore how tropes and motifs of water contribute to the thematic layers of the texts under study. In other words, it is highly significant to examine how the water motif circulates in each Black diasporic

text and setting and how each text approaches aquatic imageries differently to negotiate trauma, selfhood, and healing.

1.1. The Imagery of "Rivers" as Ancestral Continuity in Langston Hughes' Poetry

Langston Hughes is one of the important voices of the Harlem Renaissance that articulated the aspirations, dreams and disappointments of the African American community in a critical moment of racial tension (Miller 160). His interest in resistance, resilience, and self-assertion creates a committed form of art that advocates for the love of Blackness and embracing it as a center of their identity. In addition, Hughes subverts the stereotypes and the constraints imposed by a racially segregated society and replaces them with tropes of beauty, dignity, self-love and the full measure of Blackness. Critics such as Wallace have highlighted how the rhythms of blues and jazz and the everyday folk experience are used in a conversational mode to communicate the prominent themes of suffering and resilience (11-78). Therefore, his poetry is considered a vehicle for affirming the shared memory and enduring strength of the African American community.

Furthermore, Hughes' poetry carries the promise of renewal and continuity. His activism is not merely confined to literature as a means of social change, but he has also advocated for civil rights and guided young Black writers to believe in the power of art, advocacy and articulation. His remarkable poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," written at the age of seventeen, is a canonical text in Black diasporic literature. It has long been taken as an anthem of Black identity and resistance and a reflection on ancestry and history (Wallace 22). Many critics and reviewers consider the poem an embodiment of his legacy carried by those who are interested in understanding, affirming, and celebrating Black identity in all its complexity (De Santis; Graham 1-11).

In this poem, water is depicted as a central motif as Hughes invokes the great rivers of America and Africa to trace the deep roots and long-standing power of Black identity. Hughes has stressed the importance of the river as follows:

> I've known rivers:
> I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the
> flow of human blood in human veins
> My soul has grown deep like the rivers

….

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers. (Rampersad 36)

In that respect, rivers for Black diasporic subjectivity are not merely physical entities, but they are sites of roots and memory. As Dawson notes, "mountains divide, rivers unite" (119). The simile that connects the Black soul with the river situates the Black experience with the long currents of time and civilization. The image of the river is more significant compared to the Atlantic Ocean. As a metaphor of the "veins" of the soil, it has a positive connotation, whereas the Atlantic Ocean signifies the trauma of violent separation, displacement and enslavement of Black people. This repositions history from a perspective that informs dignity, pride and resilience, while repressing the shades of trauma and denigration.

More importantly, Hughes calls upon different historically significant rivers – the Euphrates, the Congo, the Nile, and the Mississippi – to locate Black identity in a cross-temporal and spatial dimension where the knowledge of rivers signifies that of identity, which is grounded in the process of dislocation, survival and metamorphic representation. The Euphrates, the Nile and the Congo Rivers indicate the authenticity of Black experience and its connection to the origin of human civilization, which in a way responds to the discourse of racial inferiority and white supremacy. On the other hand, the Mississippi River is associated with Abraham Lincoln as a site of Black assertion and metamorphosis. This captures the historical moments of change and the rise of the Black subject as a keen American citizen. So, the rivers metaphorically map the geography of Blackness, moving through different phases: dwellers of ancient civilizations, dislocation, survival, transformation and redefinition. The river as a water trope for Hughes separates the Black diasporic imaginary from the historical trauma of slavery and the Middle Passage and reconnects it to positive visions of self-assertion and resilience by metaphorically claiming profundity, stability and continuity. Thus, the river symbol absorbs suffering and loss and sustains pride, transformation and growth, which recalibrates the Black experience towards a source of resilience to endure trauma, face racism and segregation and have the ability to assert an empowered image of African American identity.

1.2. The Black Female Oceanic Rise

Maya Angelou is the second literary figure to be considered in this chapter. As an established author, poet and civil rights advocate for African American rights, her literary works have been

critically acclaimed as she stresses Black female resilience and empowerment. She relies on her personal experiences to bring the perplexity of racial identity in America and diasporic heritage back to Africa. She played a significant role during the Civil Rights Movement and subscribed to the Black female survival writing (Barnwell 133). Her autobiographies, including *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and *All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes*, not only stand as trauma narratives but also present the tenets of healing (Henke 107). According to several critics, her devotion to racial protest, resistance, self-determination, and the unflinching quest for freedom and justice are considered the source of inspiration and empowerment, which makes her literary contributions a trajectory of Black female agency formation (Walker 17).

Angelou's poetry is defined by an unflinching commitment to self-definition and resilience, challenging Black women to overcome the constraints of a racist society. Her diction is carefully selected to communicate hope, resilience, suffering and transformation (Jhansi 201-203). While Langston Hughes's use of rivers as an alternative trope for celebrating Black pride, resistance, authenticity and continuity, Angelou's poetry, and most clearly "Still I Rise," relies on the canonical imagery of the ocean to celebrate female resistance, hope and empowerment. According to critics, the poem is a declaration of feminine defiance and a testament to the ongoing feminist struggle against the double oppressive structures (Tagaylo 429; Sangeetha 8).

In "Still I Rise", Angelou subverts the traumatic chains that continued to haunt Black subjectivity and transforms them through the imagery of dust, air and water into a source of resilience, self-assertion and Black agency. The poem opens with a historical reminder about the oppression that took place against the will of Black people:

> "You may write me down in history
> With your bitter, twisted lies,
> You may trod me in the very dirt
> But still, like dust, I'll rise." (Angelou 163)

Through a conversational mode, the first stanza introduces the tone of defiance and the theme of resilience by addressing the white wash of history as it has misrepresented the presence of Black people by being silent on atrocities committed during the Middle Passage, the slave life on plantations and the ongoing struggle against segregated apparatus enforced by Jim Crow Laws to ensure the alienation and neutralization of the Black subject as an inferior racial other. The imagery of the dust connotes the repetition of ancestors' voices, and a reclaiming of the

right to joy and identity in the face of oppression. This is clearly stated in the last stanza by Maya Angelou as "I am the dream and the hope of slave, I rise".

In "Still I Rise", Angelou has relied on a metaphorical language that comprises similes to connect Black female resilience with natural phenomena, including water. For instance, she creates a metaphorical equation between the natural orbits of "moons", "suns", and "tides" to situate the Black persona with a broader, rhythmic and elemental framework. The "tides" hint at the traumatic experience of enslaving Blackness and detaching it from the mother country as much as a moment of return and strength. Through a metaphorical mode, being equal to the natural phenomenon, it makes Blackness rooted in existence with uncheckable natural power that cannot be repressed or overlooked. That is to say, the ongoing state of oppression, misrepresentation and injustice that Black people in general and African Americans in particular have faced would be subverted as "dust" rises and "tides" return to the shores of home. It also hints at the trauma of the "door of no return" that sent millions of slaves offshore and emphasizes the need for natural return.

The motif of water continues to shape the artistic hue of Angelou in the poem by explicitly evoking the prominence of the Atlantic Ocean for the African American experience in the eighth stanza as follows:

> Out of the huts of history's shame
> I rise
> Up from a past that's rooted in pain
> I rise
> I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
> Welling and swelling I bear in the tide. (164)

Unlike Hughes, Angelou emphasizes the need to face the burden of a traumatic history because, in embracing the Atlantic as a site of trauma, it becomes a source of healing and hence rising. This indicates the importance and the duality of the water motif as it embodies Angelou's quest for healing, resilience, survival, hope and redefinition. This captures the transitory depiction of water as a means of transforming trauma and pain into an era of self-assertion and empowerment.

The trope of water in Angelou's poem affirms the call for future authors and poets to embrace their history and can articulate the atrocities faced by their ancestors as a prominent

step towards healing and hope for better conditions for Blackness in America and Europe. In this sense, the water imagery symbolizes the Black struggle with the perpetual movement of water and nature and mainly the atrocities that the Atlantic Ocean has witnessed, which acts as a testifying image to historical trauma and a vision of possible rebirth by embracing resistance, resilience and hope as powerful as the sea's return. This has profoundly influenced potential Black authors such as Paul Gilroy, Grace Nichols, Caryl Phillips, and several contemporary young Black authors.

Angelou's oceanic rise can be located in Gilroy's theory of the Black Atlantic as a potential site of cultural hybridity, negotiation and transformation for the Black diasporic subject. Beyond its physicality, the Atlantic acts as a diasporic collective memory that unites all the dispersed Black people. It is a trope of trauma that creates the imaginary boundaries of the Black diasporic community. Also, it is the dynamic space that shapes the diasporic Black experience through the chronotope of the ship, which is considered "a world afloat" (Dawson 204; Gilroy 4), and hence it is the mythical home where the diasporic Black subject should dwell. This indicates a state of metamorphosis in the representation of the Atlantic as a "sea change" and the Black diasporic vision in the sense that what was once perceived as a site of terror, fear and loss becomes a site of change, freedom and self-renewal. This is articulated equally in the poem of Grace Nichols as she embraces the immensity of the Atlantic as follows:

> "Yes, divided to de ocean
>
> Divided to de bone
>
> Wherever I hang me knickers
>
> that's my home" (McDonald and Brown 169).

2. Water as a Poetic Regulator of Trauma, Mourning and Self-Reconciliation in the Twenty-First-Century Black Fiction

This section aims to delineate how the water imagery has changed from an implicit, emotionally charged articulation of selfhood and resilience into a more metaphorical and intellectually mediated landscape. It delves into how the contemporary diasporic novel constructs a trope of mourning from the motif of water to reflect on the loss, suffering and oppression that Black ancestors faced and uses it as a symbol of healing or an alternative mode of belonging. As Phillips has stated: "the key issue" for his generation is "the question of identity" (*New World Order* 275). It is important to note how water serves as a poetic regulator

that shapes the protagonists' trajectories toward self-reconciliation, communal healing and renewal in a context where the legacies of slavery, colonialism, racism and displacement continued to haunt the diasporic Black subject.

2.1. The Watery Grave in Caryl Phillips' Fiction

Caryl Phillips is one of the prominent figures in contemporary diasporic literature. He was born in the Caribbean Islands, precisely in St. Kitts, in 1958, to immigrant parents, who moved to Leeds when he was only four months old, and he was raised in the North of England. Clingman describes Phillips as "one of the youngest of migrants" (68). Living in a white working-class city, Phillips has experienced the uncertainties of the Black diasporic subject in the hostland. His early experiences of displacement, alienation and cultural assimilation/negotiation have deeply informed his literary vision and created a diasporic awareness of the complexity of belonging. In an interview, he describes the complexity of the diasporic subject as a "whole burden of having to live in two worlds" (Schatteman 52). This aligns with Du Bois's concept of double consciousness, in which Black subjectivity exists in the margins of modernity. By rejecting the myth of a nostalgic return to the West Indian home as illustrated in his novel *A State of Independence*, Phillips believes in the project of reconfiguring Britishness and Englishness by incorporating diasporic stories to revise history and recalibrate the national story of Britain, which leads to a new multicultural country (Boehmer 251). Since temporality and displacement transform both the homeland and the diasporic subject to such an extent that no entity fits the other, the first paradigm of diaspora is rejected. On the other hand, the diasporic subject recreates the tropes of home in the hostland through the act of diasporizing Britain with stories from the near history.

Phillips studied English at The Queen's College, Oxford and began a literary career as a playwright, essayist and author to achieve the project of regenerating Britain and the Black diasporic subject into a new hybrid mode where heterogeneity is acceptable. In his novels, he interrogates the complexity of modern histories and diasporic identities through themes of migration, displacement and belonging. He maps the psychological and emotional borders that the diasporic characters have to face as they negotiate the afterlives of the British Empire. In his novel *The Final Passage*, Phillips sympathizes with the displaced Black femininity living in the alienated spaces of England. Weedon considers the novel a complex texture that matches the perplexity of belonging and the fragmentation of the diasporic self, which is embodied in the mixed-race heroine, Leila (*Identity and Culture* 72). At the turn of the millennium, Phillips'

interest in telling stories of an African background became evident. He even came to share the African perspective of Chinua Achebe's criticism of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which emphasizes the refusal to reduce "the African soul" merely to a means of representing the tragic impact of colonialism in Congo (Phillips "Out of Africa"). In 2003, Phillips wrote *A Distant Shore*, which revolves around the encounter between the African dislocated subject and the peripheral spaces of loss and disappointment in Northern England. The engagement with questions of race, identity and immigration gained him acclaim and prominence in English literature. In a critical review of the novel, Diana Evans considers Caryl Phillips a "stalwart" and "one of the literary giants" of contemporary Black British writing ("A Distant Shore by Caryl Phillips").

A Distant Shore is preoccupied with narrating the hostility of Northern England and the exclusionary frontiers of the English village. Its reception is well acclaimed by being awarded the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best Book and the National Book Circle Critics Prize for fiction in 2003, and selected for the long list of the Booker Prize. The north of England is depicted as a peripheral space that continues to represent the hegemony of masculine White Englishness. The latter is highly captured as it destroys the African refugee, Gabreil/Solomon, and the English working-class woman, Dorothy. Whether political or psychological, the motif of asylum is created to reveal a common experience of loss for the abovementioned characters. Even though the novel explores the complexity of change, Walter pinpoints that its texture captures how, using her words, "England disappoints both immigrant and native" ("The Sadness of Strangers").

In the novel, water is a recurring motif that emerges consistently through the progression of the story of Gabriel/Solomon. First of all, the African protagonist is depicted as "unhomely" because his unnamed African country is afflicted with the dire conditions of postcolonial failed states (Gikandi 23; Bhabha 15). Due to the ferocity of the civil war, Gabriel was forced to immigrate to England through a series of clandestine journeys via the Mediterranean Sea and the English Channel. These maritime spaces evoke how displacement is associated with water, similar to the Middle Passage through the Atlantic. On the one hand, the "zombified clandestine" routes depict the displaced African subject as a hidden commodity, which reminds the reader of the commodification of the African as a slave during the transatlantic trade (Toivanen 120). On the other hand, the Mediterranean Sea and the English Channel are associated with hope and change for a better condition for the displaced African subject. In other words, they are considered a site of asylum and safety.

Secondly, as Gabriel crossed the British borders, he changed his name to Solomon. This indicates how the act of border crossing entails a complete transformation of identity (Hall 225). To illustrate, Gabriel/Solomon points out: "England had changed me, but was this not the very reason that I had come to England? I desired change" (*A Distant Shore* 275). Solomon moves to a small village in the North called Stoneleigh. Through the ritual of "everyday life" and "social interaction", Solomon finds stability in the village and considers it to be home (*A Distant Shore* 280). His encounter with Dorothy, working on carpentry, plumbing, night-watching and volunteering as a driver to the hospital marks Solomon's transformation into a typical mode of mobility. Regardless, the motif of water occurs again to carry the haunting experience of trauma and oppression. Solomon is captured by young thugs, murdered and his body is thrown into the village canal (53). The ritual of a dead Black body floating on the water of the canal is a trope of mourning the loss of slaves who were thrown into the Atlantic Ocean. It is a diasporic reminder of the traumatic routes of the Middle Passage. It also draws a parallel between the latter and the state of contemporaneity, where the fantasy of a utopian post-racial English society is contested and refuted.

This is confirmed by the end of the novel as Dorothy ends up mad in a convalescent unit, feeling the futility of the British landscape that has shattered both her psyche and Solomon. The motif of water heralds the failure of change and the impossibility of finding home in provincial England. In a way, this denies the physicality of diasporic home and calls for the formation of the mythical home of desire through the trope of mourning (Brah 177; Gilroy 4, 28). The imagery of a drowned Black body in an English canal is a ritual for mourning the burden of the history of slavery, oppression and discrimination, and establishing a mythical home for the diasporic Black subject. This reminds readers of the romantic vision of Caryl Phillips, whose death wish is to have a "watery grave" as his ashes will be thrown somewhere in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean (Goyal 238; *New World Order* 304).

2.2. Mourning the Watery Shades of Trauma in Evaristo's Novels

Bernardine Evaristo is one of the most influential contemporary Black British writers. Her fiction captures the transnational diasporic imaginary as it re-maps the national topography of Britishness and Englishness. She was born in England in 1959 to a Nigerian father and English mother. This has created a mixed-race heritage that shaped her path towards the perplexity of cultural identity, marginalization, racial awareness and resilience. Her novels are critically acclaimed and her last novel, *Girl, Woman, Other*, earned her recognition among

literary scholars and authors. In 2019, she received the Booker Prize and in 2021, she was elected the president of the Royal Society of Literature. Evaristo has engaged in the process of emotional relocation by rewriting the British nation and its history from a Black British female perspective. According to Weedon, her novels reflect the rise of contemporary diasporic femininity that claims Britain as a home country before transforming it into a non-racial category of identification ("Migration" 33). This post-racial tendency is common in all her novels as she relies on non-white protagonists who construe the layered identity of the mixed-race subject and defy the racially essentialist construction of the nation.

Bernardine Evaristo's novels are characterized by the use of a hybrid form that fuses verse and prose in order to create a polyphonic narrative that represents the dynamic nature of the mixed-race subject in Britain. She considers writing as an act of excavating the untold stories of the past, which informs her tendency to revise mainstream historiography and highlights how fiction's historicity revises history's fictionality. In other words, literature has historical routes, through which roots are excavated, revised and reconstituted (Hooper 4). Her novels, *Soul Tourists*, *Blonde Roots* and *Girl, Woman, Other*, among other iconic novels, engage with the legacies of imperialism, colonialism and the old days of the British Empire to examine how the latter creates sites of memory that inform national identity and the hegemony of mainstream pro-white culture. They disrupt essentialist representations about Black diasporic subjects and revise the racial map of Britain and Europe. The motif of water emerges through almost all her novels and is used as a literary device of disruption. In *Soul Tourists*, for instance, the novel focuses its story on the Windrush Sea-change to explore how post-war journeys of migration from the Caribbean informed the formation of Black British identity, which is exemplified by the protagonist, Stanley Williams. Also, it depicts how the act of crossing the Mediterranean Sea and the English Channel by African students culminates in the encounter with English femininity, which construes the mixed-race subject, who is represented by Jessie O'Donnell. This highlights how the motif of water stresses the importance of mobility, change and transformation. As highlighted by Jessie O'Donnell when he felt haunted by the burden of history, "Calais here I come…. Look, the point is to be always on the move. How exciting is that?" (*Soul Tourists* 36, 51-2).

The imagery of water indicates the connection between Britain and its historical routes. Even though the novel presents tropes of mourning against the loss that took place during the era of slavery, it attempts to propose an alternative to these maritime routes. To do so, Evaristo relies on the concept of chronotope, which is appropriated by Gilroy to depict the ship as a

diasporic chronotope of transformation. For Evaristo, Stanley's encounter with water or the sea during the 1980s was characterized by trauma, uncertainty and loss, which indicates the emotional displacement felt by the second generation of Afro-Caribbean diaspora. For instance, his father William Clasford is depicted as "sitting on the ocean bed and looking out onto a long-forgotten shipwreck", which alludes to the futility of the ship as a symbol of renegotiation (*Soul Tourist* 3; *The Black Atlantic* 4). Although it was considered highly significant in the context of the slave trade and the Windrush immigration, it fails to capture the socio-historical experience of the second generation. The latter feels emotionally detached from the first generation, which is better expressed through the imagery of water and the trope of the drowned father and son by Stanley: "I am calling him down, to come back to me, please come back to me, but my words are muffled by water and the current is drifting him away and the creatures of the deep are swimming around us….I am no anchor; he is supposed to be mine, he is going, going." (*Soul Tourists* 9).

In order to face the uncertainty of water and (un)belonging, Evaristo introduces the chronotope of the road, through which Jessie and Stanley decide to visit all the countries of Europe using Jessie's van. The encounter with maritime spaces evokes a trope of mourning the trauma of slavery and displacement. It also expresses a state of emotional dislocation and the need for change and transformation. By visiting France, Spain, Italy, Turkey and Russia in Jessie's van, the chronotope of the road acts as an alternative device to connect the diasporic subject spatially with the European continent. Temporally, however, it connects them with the marginalized diasporic routes as embodied by Black figures in the form of ghosts such as Lucy "Negro", the French Black nun, Le Chevalier de Saint-Georges Joseph Bologne, Zaryab, Hannibal of Carthage, Mary Jane Seacole, among others (*Soul Tourists* 61-223). By bringing potential Black figures from the margins of European history to attention, Evaristo recalibrates Europe and Britain's state of amnesia to locate a diasporic home and reveal how roots are shaped by routes. This is a "rooted engagement" with the nation and the continent for nothing but a reconfiguration of the boundaries of identity (Donnell 14).

2.3. The Contemporary Oceanic Rituals of Reconciliation and Return

Yaa Gyasi is a contemporary Ghanaian American writer who invests her muse in the neo-slave narrative by addressing the traumatic silences that the first-generation African writers left as they narrate Africa (Murphy 7; AAID 570). She was born in Ghana in 1989 and has been raised in the United States of America since her childhood. Her African background and

education at Stanford University informed her thematic and stylistic choices as she decides to address the unaddressed from an Afrocentric perspective. Her debut novel, *Homegoing*, was critically acclaimed by the National Book Critics Circle in 2016. It subscribes to the "routes of remembrance" (De Jong 319). Many sites of slave memory, such as Cape Coast Cast, have been ideologically commodified as sites of attraction for tourists. This not only silences the landscape of suffering that the Ethnic group Asanti was subject to, but also makes the ethnic group Fante live in a state of oblivion in the sense that slave trade history is repressed in the collective memory, hiding the complicity of their ancestors (De Jong 320). Thus, the novel relies on a cross-generational episodic narrative that retells the history of slavery in Ghana from the eighteenth century and explains how it shaped seven generations. It introduces the stories of two Ghanian sisters, whose destiny diverged: Effia remains in Ghana and is forced into a marriage of "shame" with the English slave trader and governor, James Collins, whereas Esi is captivated, enjailed in the dungeons of the Cape Coast Castle before she is sent through "the doors of no return" to the New World.

The motif of water is a recurring theme that appears throughout the novel. In a contrasting image, water and fire are considered sources of fear for the descendants of both Effia and Esi. One of the descendants of Effia called Abena "the crazy woman" because she is haunted by a woman setting fire in her dreams and she sets fire and burns her children (Gyasi 194). On the other hand, the descendants of Esi are fraught with the imagery of water and scared to death to face water, as is the case with Marcus. The motif of water is associated as well with the presence of Cape Coast Castle, which is a reminder of oppression, objectification of Black femininity, a trajectory of forced migration and a barrier of separating families and dispersing them. The dual imagery of the church and the governor's house situated above the dungeon where slaves are held captive, alongside the white man's smile to Esi before raping her, delineates the white man's tactics of manipulation and commodifying Blackness for the welfare of the European continent. This is best illustrated when Effia hears noise from the dungeon where her sister is held captive and James answers by "the mangled Fante word that came back to her … 'cargo'" (Gyasi 23-25).

The story of forced separation, oppression, suffering and unarticulated trauma comes to an end in the last chapter of the novel as the last descendants of Effia and Esi, Marjorie and Marcus, meet in America and decide to visit Ghana and the Cape Coast Castle. The final scene, in which the Old Lady Abena places the "umbilical cord" of Marjorie in the ocean and attends the ritual of putting Effia's stone pendant around Marcus's neck, whose ancestor Esi lost hers, symbolizes

reunion with home and serves as a trope of self-reconciliation for the diasporic subject. The Old Lady explains how water is dual, not only haunting Black subjectivity with traumatic memories, but also it is a way to connect with ancestors and feel emancipated: "One day, I came to these waters and I could feel the spirits of our ancestors calling to me...only bodies died. Spirits wandered (Gyasi 268-277).

CONCLUSION

By exploring the motif of water in Black diasporic literature, this chapter emphasizes the pivotal role of water in excavating the experience of belated trauma and the necessity of facing it - literally or metaphorically- to construct a safe haven for healing, empowerment, resilience and agency. Across different texts, either in verse or prose, Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou, Caryl Phillips, Bernardine Evaristo and Yaa Gyasi have inscribed the circulation of water imagery as it connects the diasporic subject and the historical routes that have informed their identities. As a result, water is considered a site of trauma negotiation and a potential symbol of healing, reconciliation and transformation.

The significance of water in these literary texts is multifaceted. In the case of Hughes and Angelou, the use of water imagery – rivers, tides and Black ocean- symbolizes the assertion of Blackness and ancestral continuity and resilience against racial oppression. On the other hand, Phillips' trope of the drowned Black body and Evaristo's alternative chronotope of the road mourn the legacy of slavery and oppression and affirm the fluidity of identity and a call for change and transformation. Moreover, Gyasi's oceanic rituals in the Atlantic Ocean and more precisely in the Cape Coast Castle embrace the mythical return of the diasporic subject to the safe shores of Africa as a trope of self-reconciliation.

E   xploring the evolution of water as a motif in twentieth and twenty-first-century Black diasporic fiction is highly significant, as it offers readers key insights into understanding how the unresolved traumatic memories embedded in history are excavated at the metaphorical level. It also accentuates the importance of using the aquatic imagery as an oceanic approach to explore the ongoing dialogue among different diasporic authors regarding critical questions about identity, trauma, transformation and renewal, which shifts the landscape of the Black diasporic imaginary.

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CHAPTER 9

"A Fertile Space for Speculation and Imagination" Jeffery Renard Allen's Rails under My Back and the Black Metropolis

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ABSTRACT

This examination of Jeffery Renard Allen's Rails under My Back (2000) reads this novel within and against studies of urban space and social structures in twentieth century and contemporary Chicago. Recognizing Allen's fiction as a chronicle of one family's experiences within the Great Migration—the six-decade long movement of Black people from the rural South to the urban, industrial North— "'A Fertile Space for Speculation and Imagination'" connects Rails to both the literary and scholarly traditions that inform and construct the city of Chicago. Treating Allen's innovative novel as a tour de force of Black experience, this essay reaches back, linking his writing to work by Richard Wright as well as Horace Cayton and St. Clair Drake's groundbreaking study of "The Negro in a Northern City," Black Metropolis. Discussing Allen's characters and the rich settings that they move through and occupy, "'A Fertile Space for Speculation and Imagination'" traces the shifts from the concrete and steel modern American cities of the twentieth century to the deindustrialized, urban spaces of late capitalism. It does so while bringing attention to the detailed and polished writing Allen's spectacular debut novel.

Richard Wright wrote his enthusiastic introduction to the first edition of Horace Cayton and St. Clair Drake's *Black Metropolis* (1945) during his extended stay in Sainte-Petronille, Quebec. Wright spent time in this small French-speaking village on the Île d'Orèans shortly before departing for Paris to live as an expatriate in 1946. Written as hostilities in the European Theatre of World War II were months away from reaching their conclusion, Wright's introduction places Cayton and Drake's groundbreaking account of urbanization and Black life in the United States against a backdrop of world war, global economic upheaval, and the rise of totalitarian states that he witnessed during the opening decades of the twentieth century. Praising *Black Metropolis* for its insightful treatment of Black life and the Great Migration, Wright appreciates their analysis and depiction of the complex exchanges occurring between Chicago and the city's Black population, under the rubric of mid-twentieth century urban, industrial modernity.

Connecting Cayton and Drake's study to scholarly examinations of Chicago's urban space found in works by Robert Park, Louis Wirth, and E. Franklin Frazier, among many others, Wright asserts that "Chicago is the *known* city; perhaps more is known about how it is run, how it kills, how it loves, steals, helps, gives, cheats, and crushes than any other city in the world (xvi)". Adding that "Chicago is the city from which the most incisive and radical Negro thought has come; there is an open and raw beauty about the city that seems either to kill or endow one with the spirit of life" (xvii), before he goes on to suggests that *Black Metropolis* "supplements and endorses the conclusions arrived at by Gunnar Myrdal in his *American Dilemma* (xxxix)."

Wright's introduction to *Black Metropolis* also brings attention to engagements between Black cultural production and urban space. Focusing on written work by literary artists and scholars, he imagines possibilities for representations of Black urban life by asking, "What new values of action of experience can be revealed by looking at Negro life through alien eyes or under the lenses of new concepts? We have the testimony of a Gunnar Myrdal, but we know that is not all. What would life on Chicago's South Side look like when seen through the eyes of a Freud, a Joyce, a Proust, a Pavlov, and a Kierkegaard?" (xxxi) Raising these questions, Wright gestures toward the possibilities invested in literary treatments of Black life in Chicago as well as anticipating prose and poetry written by Black writers working in the city during the twentieth century, including Gwendolyn Brooks, Leon Forrest, Carolyn Rogers, Cyrus Colter, and Sterling Plumpp.

More than a half-century after Wright's introduction to *Black Metropolis* called for critical, imaginative literary examinations of Black urban space in Chicago, the publication of Jeffery Renard

Allen's *Rails under My Back* (2000) delivers its incisive, contemporary contribution to this foundational dialogue in Black letters. As *Rails* performs its own mapping of "Black life in a Northern city," Allen joins Wright and those many other Black writers whose work investigates the "open and raw beauty" of the Black Metropolis. He enters this dialogue as his novel chronicles the Simmons/ Griffith family's movements to and from, in and out of an unnamed Northern city that maintains a set of clear correspondences with Chicago. Surveying kinship and lineage across multiple generations, *Rails* charts moments and memories embedded in Black urban space, unpacking an archive of lost, found, forgotten, and remembered interactions that resonate and reverberate through, within, above, and beneath the city that Allen's characters have, at once, made and grown to know.

Rails renders a multi-vocal, multi-valent tale of migrations to and from an urban space that maintains a distinct set of parallels with the Chicago described in Cayton and Drake's *Black Metropolis*. Marking a varied set of features on its detailed literary survey of Black America's interior, Allen's novel examines more than a century of lived experience. Locating points of confluence where identity, myth, and expression shape and inform the city's sites and spaces, *Rails* delivers a series of studied portraits in Blackness. Throughout his literary *tour de force*—encompassing history, memory, and geography—Allen deploys a range of characters who, at times simultaneously, enter and retreat from singular and collected interactions with their Black Metropolis. Foremost among these figures are the novel's three distinct, yet decidedly conjoined co-protagonists, whose exploits and adventures intersect, overlap, and diverge, throughout the novel, driving the energy and direction of its plot and actions.

Hatch, Jesus, and Portia Jones— Allen's co-protagonists—move along a series of interrelated, yet decidedly distanced, pathways as they pursue a range of personal, familial, and generational matters. Within the novel, Hatch and Portia (who are brother and sister) along with their cousin Jesus arrive as the children of two twin brothers (John and Lucifer Jones) who married two twin sisters (Sheila and Gracie McShan) shortly after migrating to the city from the Mid-South. As a set of three cousins, Allen's co-protagonists share and access intimate knowledge and understandings of their family tree's distinct segmentation, as well as its growth and development within the Black Metropolis.

Over the course of the novel, Hatch, Jesus, and Portia become increasingly circumscribed within an ever more constrictive knot of ancestral connections and familial deceptions. Moving about the city on foot, by train, and in automobiles, in addition to other less ordinary means of conveyance, including what may be understood as levitation and astral projection, the co-protagonists encounter, note, account for, and participate in an array of activities and undertakings that frame their environment

and its inhabitants. Performing acts of recovery, discovery, and defiance, *Rails*' co-protagonists make their way into and out of war zones and mega churches, go to and from plantations, navigate along back alleys and ghetto streets and saunter through lavish penthouses in addition to finding themselves in kitchens, studios, boxcars and funeral homes. Doing so, they reconnect with family and "tradition" defined by an expansive territory that extends beyond the width and breadth of their City, ranging above and below the Mason-Dixon line, reaching out, onto the high seas and into the stratosphere. Investigating these spaces and claiming places, the three cousins follow the arc of their family tree, seeking and finding the stories, secrets, and suspicions that are embedded within their Black Metropolis

"tangled between the rails"

The fantastic urban landscape depicted in *Rails under My Back* bears more than a passing resemblance to late-twentieth-century Chicago, where Allen was born and came of age. The novel's topography, architecture, and geo-social footprint reflect the writer's intimate relationship with this city. As such, his novel updates and transforms the Chicagos found in Wright's fiction or Cayton and Drake's sociology. These concrete and steel, blast furnace and Black Belt representations of the city give way to the post-industrial, late capitalist urban spaces that Allen explores in *Rails*. His Black Metropolis is defined by twelve glimmering river/ rail lines that connect and divide the gargantuan public housing complexes and immense lake front that serve as the novel's prominent geographic features.

Undertaking its detailed spatial and temporal exploration of the city—entering its past, present, and future— *Rails* illustrates the intimate interplay that occurs between urban environments and literary work. Allen's co-protagonists' make these connections evident as they move in and about the cityscape, effectively gesturing toward Chicago's long-standing dialogue with American literary naturalism. Shadowed by an impending sense of catastrophe and eminent crisis, Hatch, Jesus, and Portia's haunted motions underscore the novel's relationship with this considerable tradition. Entering conversation with earlier generations of Chicago Black writers, such as Wright, Willard Motley, and Frank Marshall Davis, *Rails* also engages literary legacies forged by other Chicago writers, including Theodore Dreiser, Upton Sinclair, James T. Farrell, and Nelson Algren.

At the same time, as it updates and revises the Chicago neighborhood novel and performs its own explorations of literary naturalism, *Rails* also speaks to fiction written by Allen's contemporaries. In addition to establishing a foothold within critical conversations concerned with Afrofuturism, the novel also finds points of engagement with work by white-identified, Chicago writers who examine identity, experience, and urban space under the regime of neo-liberal development and policy. For

example, Stuart Dybek's *Coast of Chicago* (1990), Alex Shakar's *The Savage Girl* (2001) and Aleksandar Hemon's *Nowhere Man* (2002) each find connections with *Rails'* literary explorations of the contemporary city scape.

Making these links evident, Allen's co-protagonists demonstrate their keen awareness of and strong disregard for the various modes of surveillance technology they encounter in public spaces throughout their city. At time of the novel's publication, camaras and other types of observation instruments were far less prevalent in urban space than they are presently. As such, they represented a futuristic method of "crime fighting" that was deployed, in large part, within residential districts inhabited by people of color. Recalling these conditions, these instruments are omnipresent in *Rails*. Hatch, Jesus, and Portia are repeatedly tracked and recorded as they move about their city, which is increasingly defined by privatized spaces that glisten in contrast to a crumbling public infrastructure and looming threats posed by environmental disaster. With these conditions shaping their daily lives, throughout the novel, Allen's co-protagonists deliver a critique of the overly determined, twentieth century "nature/nurture" debates, which acted as proving grounds for development policy and social programs promulgated during the overlapping eras of the Great Migration (1910-1970) and the so-called "New" European Immigration to the United States (1880-1924).

In this way, *Rails* constructs a literary chronicle of Black urban experience, charting the flow of capital, power, and bodies into the city, from the high point of the Great Migration to the contemporary moment. (Re)collecting fragments from the dreams, drama, and disappointments that their family members have carried to and extracted from their Black Metropolis, Jesus, Hatch, and Portia, work, walk, and will themselves into and/or away from the possibilities invested in urban life. In this way, settings and characters populating Allen's novel deliver a literary coda on the Great Migration, effectively identifying how and where Black experience has been impacted by urbanization. At the same time, *Rails* also illustrates transformations occurring within the structure and administration of urban space in the United States, marking the rise of neo-liberal policy regimes both within the nation and around the world.

Like those members of the Simmons/Griffith family who have come to the city before them, Allen's co-protagonists seek and find points of ingress and egress within the fabric of urban space. Propelled by the angers, ecstasy, and terrors that this space affords—as well as the inherent feelings of detachment and devotion summonsed by the Black Metropolis —Jesus, Hatch, and Portia reconfigure the scope, span, and trajectory of narratives traditionally aligned with the Great Migration. In this way, the three cousins take steps and make decisions that effectively reject notions of predetermined progress

and unfettered freedom that rest upon myths of Northern exceptionalism. Confronting a set of self-evident truths inherent to American Anti-Black racism, *Rails* takes stock of the weight and mass of this social ill's blunt force.

As it carries out this project, Allen's fiction also illustrates the spatial and architectural transformations that would distinguish the modern city from postmodern urban environments. Hatch, Jesus, and Portia pursue and identify these development patterns in *Rail*s. Each in their own way, the three co-protagonists traverse and connect the disparate geographies comprised by public spaces and public policy regimes connecting Black experience to the Black Metropolis, writ large. Reading *Rails* in conversation with Setha Low and Neil Smith's *Politics of Public Space* (2005), makes the sustained engagements that Allen's novel maintains with these matters decidedly evident.

In their study of urban space and public policy, Low and Smith devote specific attention to the discursive relationship between dialogues concerned with "public space" and those engaging "the public sphere." These scholars are quick to point out that while these important conversations in urban studies "can certainly overlap," they are best understood to "occupy quite separate domains." (5) Making this distinction, Low and Smith go on to argue that even if public space and public sphere "have not really come together,'" it is important to recognize that "an understanding of public space is an imperative for understanding the public sphere". In this way these scholars assert that failing to recognize the two spatial frames interrelated development fails to acknowledge the central position geography holds within the process of cultural formation. Importantly, as they go about making these distinctions, Low and Smith animate their project by developing and the term, "lost geography."

As a work of urban fiction that focuses on Black experience, *Rails under My Back* serves as a literary bridge into the realm of "lost geography." Understood in this way, Allen's novel locates and connects a series of points where public sphere and public space intersect: Moving to, from, and within their Black Metropolis, Allen's characters in *Rails* effectively become positioned between the "space" and "sphere" that Low and Smith work to differentiate in their study. For example, consistently finding themselves in urban spaces that have become "tangled between the rails (Allen 98)," Hatch, Jesus, and Portia effectively enter what Low and Smith describe as "lost geographies". As they traverse and/or occupy these spaces, the co-protagonists participate and, at times, initiate the varied, extensive, experiential recovery projects that unfold through the course of the novel.

In their unceasing, relentless movements through the city, the three cousins "martyr to motion" (3): Like previous generations of the Simmons/Griffith family—whether they are going across town or

crossing the Mason-Dixon line—Allen's co-protagonists' engagements with public space maintain discrete relationships with the public sphere. In this way, throughout the novel, Hatch, Jesus, and Portia converge and convene, constructing a collaborative survey of their Black Metropolis. The cousins, thereby, simultaneously enhance their audience's understanding of Black experience within urban space—including Black writing about urban space—as they revise prevailing notions about Black urban experience, particularly those that would regard and classify it as an unstable and fundamentally disposable social structure.

"*buckets cast down in the middle of South Lincoln*"

On a foundational level, *Rails under My Back* is a novel about public space. Its co-protagonists engage and interact with city streets, sidewalks, basketball courts, housing complexes, and various modes of public transportation—especially trains—in their movements through the vast urban expanse of Allen's Black Metropolis. Connecting these public spaces, Hatch, Jesus, and Portia create a set of loci in which Black experience is enacted. The three cousins arrive, enter, and move through these sites, joining other people of African descent in and at various congregation places, gatherings, and assemblies, including concerts, religious revivals, marches, and demonstrations.

Like other members of the Simmons/ Griffith family who populate the novel, the three co-protagonists claim and identify these sites, linking public space to their individual and collective experience. By doing so, whether they are acting "privately," "personally," as "members of the public," or even in the context of "family," Allen's characters effectively invest and imbue Black urban space with a measure of resolute significance. Simultaneously mapping "lost" and "known" regions of their city, *Rails* delivers a literary response to Low and Smith's *Politics of Public Space* and this study's call to close the gap between discussions of public space and public sphere. At the same time, Allen's novel also works to answer the challenge Richard Wright issues by asking for Black writers to render their own accounts of Black urban experience in his "Introduction" to Cayton and Drake's *Black Metropolis*.

Madhu Dubey examines literary depictions of urban space in works of fiction by Black writers in *Signs and Cities: Black Literary Postmodernism* (2003). Using literary work by Black writers published since 1972, Dubey delivers an unequivocal critique of urban development in the United States since the implementation of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs. Bringing consideration to ways in which urban theory and Black fiction imagine portions of the contemporary urban landscape, *Signs and Cities* makes a considerable contribution to conversations concerned

with public space and public policy. Exploring literary production in the United States during the last quarter of the twentieth century, Dubey's study poses a challenge to urbanists and literary critics, alike, who would be satisfied discussing contemporary cityscapes—actual or fictional—by using catch-all terms, such as "matrix, kaleidoscope, collage, or bricolage."

Although she recognizes the inherent attraction of theories that conceive of urban space as the potential site for experimentation and possibilities, Dubey, nevertheless, regards representations of the city as a cultural laboratory or incubator of difference to be facile and unsupportable. Focusing on Black fiction, using John Edgar Wideman's *Philadelphia Fire* (1990) and Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993) as examples, Dubey makes a case for the complex composition of contemporary urban space. Taking umbrage with discussions of urban space and literary representation of Black experience that speak to their subjects in terms of "illegibility" or "indeterminacy," Dubey levels her critique at discussions that would position the so-call "inner city" as an under-theorized site of "difference" (198).

Making the case that these perspectives limit "genuine alterity," Dubey suggests that discussions of urban space as a geography of individual liberation and/or cultural remediation profoundly misreads forces and conditions embedded within urbanity. *Signs and Cities* delivers its critique of neo-liberal development, calling out urbanists, literary theorists, and creative writers who would claim late capitalist, postmodern urban geographies as sites for open negotiations about "possibilities" and "differences." It suggests that these writers risk ignoring social and economic conditions that inform an increasingly fragmented social structure and ultimately work to enforce contemporary urban development regimes. Dubey underscores these claims, pointing to the easy contrast between "glittering downtowns and public housing projects." She writes that when these sort of class and cultural juxtapositions "imagine postmodern cities as random interplays between differences," they fail to acknowledge that "social divisions are becoming polarized" and, as such, may be understood as a "gesture of concealment, containment and compensation" (199).

The movements that propel Hatch, Jesus, and Portia Jones through their Black Metropolis in *Rails under My Back* offer a dynamic response to the uneven, camouflaged, urban (re)development policies that Dubey examines in *Signs and Cities.* Given the geographic, generational, and institutional knowledge of the Black Metropolis that Allen's co-protagonists possess, they locate sites that bear the unmistakable scent of economic and social inequality. In this way, the cousins' movements through the city are not filtered by neo-liberal rhetoric about progress and renewal. The

urban spaces they map is distinct and removed from the separate allusive, even deceptive, practices of contemporary urban policy.

As such, it is possible to suggest that Hatch, Jesus, and Portia each make their own equitable uses of public space in the public sphere. While they may act in ways that are neither fully anticipated nor entirely conventional, the co-protagonists all seem to "honor diversity" by enacting socially and culturally—if not politically—democratic, activity in the public sphere. When identified as young, Black people, the three cousins find themselves inscribed upon and within the urban landscape of their Black Metropolis, becoming primary witnesses of urban and social policy in the United States. Generationally, these characters were born into the monumental transformations of urban space, which resulted from post-War urban development programs, including the construction of highway systems and housing projects. Hatch, Jesus, and Portia, thereby, may be understood as children of the Johnson-era "renewal" efforts, such as the Model Cities program of the 1960s and '70's. At the same time, coming of age during the "Reagan Revolution" of the 1980s, they also witnessed the rise of "redevelopment" regimes, which have contributed to the fraying of connections between urban policy, structural investment, and Black city dwellers in the United States.

As such, Allen's co-protagonists experience Black urban space in ways that are far different than those of their parents and ancestors. Hatch, Jesus, and Portia stand as actual "native sons" of the Black Metropolis: their lived "difference"—a kind of "indigeneity" to this space and its environmental forces –effectively shapes and defines their engagement with the city in ways their parents and grandparents could never have known. Yet, despite the strength of the claims that they can make on the city and its geography, great portions of the Black Metropolis—invested with their memories and histories—have been steadily encroached upon by forces and conditions of late capitalist, postmodernity. Rendered by and through neo-liberal policy regimes, these geographic incursions against sites and spaces that they've claim within their city —a kind of colonial real estate venture—are evident throughout *Rails*, beginning with its first chapter.

The novel opens as Jesus makes his way through a bustling morning street scene outside of his living space in the city's North Park neighborhood. The situation abruptly changes as he descends into the subway through a foul-smelling corridor. The stench and visible neglect he in this public space effectively serves notice and puts Jesus on-guard at the outset of his journey to the Red Hook Projects in the neighborhood known as South Lincoln. In this way, the odor signals that as Jesus enters the subway station, he's begun moving deeper into the "interior" regions of the Black Metropolis and commenced exploring the intersections of public policy and personal identity.

Bathed in the scent of violence and danger, Jesus' demeanor is swiftly transformed. He has "become stone," sensing the inherent hazards of this space as he boards the train to South Lincoln, abruptly ceasing the playful recitation of rhymes he'd been reciting while moving easily through the streets of North Park

Nevertheless, giving his body and mind to the promise of continued motion, Jesus is propelled through the bowels of the city. Understanding the subway station and his train car as "public spaces," Allen's co-protagonist becomes positioned between the hard edges of public space and public sphere. The public transportation odors wafting over him poignantly confirm the power that the public sphere and its policy regime maintain within the Black Metropolis. On its most base level, "policy" has allowed the station and train car—vital portions of this "sphere"—to reach this degraded state. However, and perhaps more significantly, the subway's stench—and its incumbent sense of threat—awakens a set of deep memories within Jesus, allowing him to recall the rail trips he and his cousin Hatch made to see family relatives in the American South when they were young. Recalling these summertime trips to West Memphis against the vile odors permeating this urban public space, Jesus revives the sour scent of the public policy known as Jim Crow segregation, which he and Hatch experienced first-hand during these trips into their ancestral homeland.

This personal, private public policy reverie ends as Jesus alights from the train at a subway platform that is located, somehow, three stories *above* street level.   Filled with wonder that the subway has made another successful *descent* into South Lincoln, Jesus sets out to find the notorious underworld figure known as No Face. Heading through the streets of this neighborhood, he makes his way to Red Hook Housing Projects, Building One, where Jesus has arranged to meet No Face. Upon his arrival in South Lincoln, it very quickly becomes evident that Allen's co-protagonist has entered what Low and Smith would describe in *Politics of Public Space* as "lost geography." For example, where the morning streets of North Park brough Jesus to song, he is made silent by South Lincoln's glowering menace as he moves on toward Red Hook: hooded Black men, gathered by a fire barrel, drink "from a swollen paper bag;" the body of a "scorched black dog" lays in the roadway; birds circle as "black specks high above the buildings."

Yet, despite encountering these signs of contemporary urban distress, Jesus is, nevertheless, awestruck when he casts his eyes upon, the Red Hook Public Housing Complex. It stands before him elevated, shimmering, and otherworldly, "Twelve buildings, each twenty-six stories high, a red brick path thrusting skyward, poking clouds, bleeding them." Bathed in an unnatural radiance, Red

Hook is, at once, signal beacon, city on a hill, and castle beyond the clouds, where "each building [acts as] a planet" delivering a "galaxy of colors" (15).

Describing Red Hook in these terms, Jesus speaks to notions of "difference" that Dubey's readings of postmodern urban theory questions in *Signs and Cities*. Despite its grim standing as equal parts laboratory, holding tank, and warehouse, Allen's co-protagonist invests Red Hook with "possibility." However, this is a possibility rooted in experience and enactment, rather than the type sought by contemporary urbanists seeking alignment with the "difference" they observe in South Lincoln. Instead, the Red Hook Jesus observes and covets, is invested with significance in marked by his own personalized, geographic imaginary. Rather than a theoretical abstraction, the housing complex becomes source and resource for his efforts to reclaim space within the Black Metropolis. Pursuing these ends, Jesus—like Hatch and Portia— effectively works to find and establish connections to both family and identity through place.

Each of Allen's co-protagonists make their own sojourns to and from Red Hook throughout the course of *Rails*. Paired with its architectural and geographic counterpoint, the Stonewall Housing Complex, Red Hook becomes the touchstone for the three cousins' personal development and education. As Hatch, Jesus, and Portia make their pilgrimages to the projects, they witness, collect, and consider juxtapositions and conditions presented by realities housed by the Black Metropolis. For example, in the trip to Red Hook that Jesus takes during the opening section of *Rails*, Allen's co-protagonist receives a tour of Building One from No Face, himself. Making their way through the building's corridors, No Face notes a change he's observed during his time as a Building One resident, casually informing Jesus, *"used to be able to drop yo garbage into the incinerator….'Til people started stuffing their babies down wit the garbage"* (15).

Red Hook's lore and mystique—graphic, raw, fantastic—maintains a powerful hold on Allen's co-protagonists. Seeking love, power, or truth, Hatch, Jesus, and Portia travel to and from the housing project. Filling the cousins' imaginations and occupying their physical beings, its sights, structures, and sounds inform their visits, speaking to their curiosities, needs, and desires. Witnessing Red Hook's lived realities and observing its everyday processes, *Rails'* co-protagonists effectively interrupt and even reverse received urban containment narratives that would seek to, as Dubey suggests, conceal and collapse the complexities of Black urban experience. By traveling to Red Hook, its buildings and inhabitants enhance and elevate the perspectives on and understandings of the Black Metropolis that Hatch, Jesus, and Portia hold and maintain.

The depth of these experiential lesson become especially evident in "CITY DREAM," the fourth and final section of *Rails*. In this portion of the novel, Jesus travels to South Lincoln accompanied by Lady T., a Red Hook native with ties to a powerful underworld boss known as Freeze. Approaching their destination, Jesus sees and describes the Red Hook complex,

> Twelve red buildings rise like missiles against the red summer horizon. Ash images of burned-out buildings and houses here and there. Red Hook. The world itself is made of stone: paper, water wind and flame can do nothing against it. Like Red Hook itself. Inevitable. Indestructible. (495)

Assuming this type of overhead, long-distance, perspective—the type that might be captured by a television news helicopter or in the opening shot of an action, adventure film—Jesus describes Red Hook in monolithic terms. Growing closer the "inevitable," "indestructible," "stone" housing complex takes the appearance of a parade ground or military base; its residents becoming cadets, glazed and set in place with spit and polish, as Lady T. and Jesus arrive.

The panoramic, aerial description of a descent into Red Hook that Jesus provides in this section of *Rails* resonates with the "street-level" sketch of the housing complex that his cousin Hatch delivers in the second section of the novel, "THE CHOOSEN." As he approaches Red Hook on foot, Hatch considers the streets of South Lincoln and observes that,

> Even the sky was dirty here, canvas colored, a rough sun pasted to it. Used papers fluttered about, giant moths. The morning full of sirens, moving in waves, crashing and rising again. Stonewall and Red Hook red in the distance of the horizon. Gatewayed in his eyes. Sparkled like two big buckets a cast down in the middle of South Lincoln. (375)

From his vantage point, the presence of natural elements—sky, sun, and water – allows Hatch to situate South Lincoln's "lost geography"—and, by extension, Black urban experience—within the context of a fragile, living eco-system. Connecting celestial bodies, insects, tides, and ocean waves in his description of the urban space surrounding Red Hook, Hatch breaks the combination of carceral, sci-fi military futurism that distinguishes the housing complex from the other sites and spaces comprising Allen's Black Metropolis.

In addition to making these connections to natural systems, Hatch's comments also evoke the enduring Black literary trope of "buckets cast down," a phrase he draws from the speech Booker T. Washington delivered at the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta, Georgia on September 18, 1895, widely known as the "Atlanta Compromise Speech." Presenting Red Hook and its companion/sister/twin public housing complex, Stonewall, as "two big buckets cast down in the middle of South Lincoln," the housing projects stand out as prominent features in the Black Metropolis's "lost geography." Described as such, they become reflective pools, mirroring the delicate psychological condition that Hatch demonstrates at this stage of the novel. Overly invested in a desperate search for his Uncle John—Jesus's father—who has mysteriously gone missing, Hatch becomes increasingly unstable. However, finding his way to Red Hook and Stonewall, the housing projects provide him with unlikely sources of support and direction as he seeks information about his uncle's whereabouts.

As he moves through Red Hook, Stonewall, and greater South Lincoln, these portions of the city calm Hatch, addressing him with candor, offering him instruction. Entering a form of sympathetic resonance with Hatch, similar to the ways they engage his cousin, Jesus, the housing complex and this neighborhood becomes enmeshed in a delicate environmental network. Not only do these portions of Allen's Black Metropolis act as a tonic to Hatch's volatile condition, but they serve as conduits for revising widely held notions about public space, public policy and Black experience in the United States. Working against narratives that would render these regions as "unnatural" and "inaccessible," *Rails* delivers a decidedly different set of outcomes that emerge, for example, when Allen writes,

> [a] car rolled past and roared to stop at the corner, turned, leaving behind the power of its sound. Red Hook rose up before him. A still red flower, sixteen buildings arranged petal-fashion. Wine-flushed [men] dogged a corner, leashed to a lamppost. Nerves went electric in his body. (375)

With this description of Red Hook— "arranged petal-fashion," becoming "a still red flower"—Hatch enters a state of heightened empathy, his nerves "electric" seeming to synchronize himself with the movements and motions of the residents and occupants with the complex. Speaking to conditions that converge in this corner of urban Black America, Allen's fiction identifies a point of vulnerability within the Black Metropolis, having entered a breach in the urban structure where public space is "compromised" and, therefore, deemed expendable by public policy regimes.

Throughout *Rails*, the three cousins are ultimately subject to the neglect and ignorance of transportation and public housing authorities, in addition to being confronted by layers of violent disapproval enacted by law enforcement and the bureaucratic distain emanating from park districts and streets and sanitation departments. Counteracting these forces, Allen's co-protagonists, along with their family members, survey and record the public space they claim, discover, and manifest within the Black Metropolis. Throughout the course of the novel, Hatch, Jesus and Portia work to inscribe a fully legible Black presence on the contemporary urban landscape. Their collective and individual mapping projects, thereby, subvert the actions of neo-liberal policy regimes that would bring about its erasure. In this way, *Rails* delivers a profound and palpable *challenge* to notions of Black urban experience that allow—and even promote—readings of the Black Metropolis as a site of exoticized "difference" and "possibility" or a buffer zone "where irrational violence is the norm and people simply disappear" (Butler 170).

Rails offers a sharp contrast these readings of Black urban space by rendering detailed sketches of Black America's structural and functional engagements with and within the American city. Portia makes this project evident in another moment from the novel's longest section "THE CHOSEN". Like her cousin Jesus and brother Hatch, she also understands Red Hook as sanctuary space, recovery zone, and reunion site. Having become romantically involved with a Red Hook native known as Deathrow, Portia finds her mind wondering, while working as a model for a drawing class. In what vears toward an out of body experience, as she sits, naked before "eyes and hands," Portia visualizes herself driving to South Lincoln, going to Red Hook and visiting Deathrow.

At the outset of this imagined journey, reminding herself that "the surest way to the center is through a maze" (373), Portia makes her way through the Black Metropolis by driving her Japanese sports car ("*Yes*, *the Datsun 280ZX*") and locating Red Hook at the "center" of South Lincoln's tangle of roadways and hazards. Reconstructing the details of her first trip to see Deathrow, the description she delivers of that journey are thick and exacting: an ice storm, her grip on the car's steering wheel, finding a parking spot, are all conveyed vividly. Yet, even for her exacting mind's eye, recalling the sight of housing complex is singular and arresting. She states,

> The Red Hook Housing Projects—*the jets*, so they called it, toilet flush and airplane
> roar—ringed it, a soaring metal commode flooded with an invisible tide of heaving
> black brown yellow flesh…Sealed inside the car, she observed square metal giants

that looked down on small slumped-over houses set down boulderlike and squeezed together in silent rows. (374)

In this way, Red Hook's immensity and capacity tests Portia, just as it tests her cousin and her brother. Caught within its grip, she questions her thinking, along with her ability and resolve to negotiate with its geographic gravity. Even in a reverie, from the moment she exits the highway and finds her mind in South Lincoln, Portia is challenged by its twisting, twisted surface streets. At once recalling and imagining scenes where "[u]nder a blind streetlamp, corner boys tried to float an old gymshoe on a puddle. And hooded boys (men?) moved lethargic, dreamlike, in the half-light of rain and street" (374), a deep sense of foreboding arises, becoming a powerful reminder for her to stand away and keep "it at a distance" (374).

Portia's Red Hook, along with those of Hatch and Jesus, comes into sharper focus through Carl Rotella's study of public housing and American urban fiction since 1949, *October Cities* (1998). Considering the imprint that the construction of public housing has made on American cities, Rotella plainly states that "the projects served as beacons, warning the rest of the metropolis— residents and businesses—to stay away from the black inner city" (206). Like Allen, Rotella is a Chicago native and maintains and interest in what he describes as the city's "distinctive high-rise form of notoriously dangerous and unclean post-war housing projects" and the way they've "marked the efforts of policy makers to fix the second ghetto in place as it grew" (206).

Framed by these comments, meditations delivered in *Rails* by Allen's co-protagonists Black urban space gain a measure of context. Within the novel, Red Hook and Stonewall stand as a pair of urban Leviathans: menacing multi-use structures, impossible to ignore or reproduce. The twin complexes become focal points within Allen's fiction and on its map of the Black Metropolis. Through their actual and imaginary encounters with Red Hook and Stonewall, Hatch, Jesus, and Portia investing these public housing complexes with memory and mythology. Locating, recovering, and engaging both collective and individual connections to their city, the co-protagonists, thereby, revise and reconfigure relationships between public space, public policy and Black urban experience.

In this way, *Rails under My Back* revisits false familiarities that pervade the image of the public housing within contemporary urban space, calling to question whether "the projects" are indeed a "known" quarter of the Black Metropolis. When positioned at the intersection of conversations concerning public space and public sphere, Allen's novel allows the Red Hook

Housing Complex to speak, albeit through No Face the Thief, who cryptically and repeatedly reminds his interlocutors "You don't know me from Adam." Alluding to a set of hard—if not self-evident—truths, *Rails*, thereby, delivers a literary engagement with Black experience, rejecting premature and prejudiced dismissals of Black urban space as a chaotic site of illegibility or, simply, "the jets the end of the road" (Allen 499).

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CHAPTER 10

What It Means to Belong: Displacement and the Redefinition of Home in Adiche's "The Arrangers of Marriage"

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ABSTRACT

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Arrangers of Marriage* explores themes of displacement, identity, and the redefinition of "home" within the context of the Nigerian diaspora. This study probes into Adichie's protagonist's journey and her portrayal of the cultural tensions between the character's Nigerian roots and her new life in America. It reflects on broader concerns of postcolonial identity and belonging. Hence, and taking it bearings from Bhabha's postcolonial concepts of cultural hybridity and the third space, this chapter aims to explore the complexities of cultural adaptation and the emotional struggles of living between two worlds. The narrative offers insight into the fluid and often painful process of redefining what it means to belong, particularly for women facing both societal and personal expectations. By analyzing the intersection of displacement, gender roles, and cultural hybridization, this chapter argues that Adichie redefines the notion of home as a dynamic and evolving space, shaped by both personal experiences and collective histories. This study contributes to the broader discourse on migration and identity, highlighting the ongoing relevance of these themes in the globalized, postcolonial world. Therefore, and through the lens of postcolonialism, this study addresses two central research questions:

1/ How does Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Arrangers of Marriage* explore the concept of belonging through the protagonist's negotiation of cultural identity within the context of Nigerian diaspora and American assimilation?

2/ In what ways do themes of displacement, gender, and tradition contribute to the redefinition of "home" in *The Arrangers of Marriage*, and how does this challenge conventional understandings of belonging in a postcolonial context?

Keywords: Displacement, Identity, Home, Hybridity, African Diaspora.

INTRODUCTION

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "The Arrangers of Marriage" explores themes of displacement, identity, and the redefinition of "home" within the context of the Nigerian diaspora. This study probes into Adichie's protagonist's journey and her portrayal of the cultural tensions between the character's Nigerian roots and her new life in America. It reflects on broader concerns of postcolonial identity and belonging. Hence, and taking it bearings from Bhabha's postcolonial concepts of cultural hybridity and the third space, this chapter aims to explore the complexities of cultural adaptation and the emotional struggles of living between two worlds. The narrative offers insight into the fluid and often painful process of redefining what it means to belong, particularly for women facing both social and personal expectations. By analyzing the intersection of displacement, gender roles, and cultural hybridization, this chapter argues that Adichie redefines the notion of home as a dynamic and evolving space, shaped by both personal experiences and collective histories. This study contributes to the broader discourse on migration and identity, highlighting the ongoing relevance of these themes in the globalized, postcolonial world. Therefore, and through the lens of postcolonialism, this study addresses two central research questions:

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2/ In what ways do themes of displacement, gender, and tradition contribute to the redefinition of "home" in "The Arrangers of Marriage", and how does this challenge conventional understandings of belonging in a postcolonial context?

1. Review of the Literature

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's fiction, mainly novels have received widespread critical acclaim for their subtle interrogation of identity, migration, gender, and postcolonial belonging within the Nigerian and diasporic experience. Her long-form fiction, particularly *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), and *Americanah* (2013), has been the primary focus of most scholarly engagement with her work. These texts have served as fertile ground for examining how postcolonial Nigerian subjects explore cultural hybridity, political rupture, and the personal costs of global displacement.

Americanah, has particularly attracted sustained critical attention as a novel that deftly explores the transnational movement of its protagonist, Ifemelu, who migrates to the United States and eventually returns to Nigeria. Scholars such as Madhu Dubey (2013) and Lindsey Green-Simms (2014) argue that the novel critiques the racial dynamics of American society while simultaneously interrogating the affective tensions of diasporic identity. Ifemelu's journey which is marked by assimilation, resistance, and eventual repatriation becomes emblematic of the contradictions inherent in the global mobility of postcolonial subjects. For Dubey, Adichie constructs "diaspora not simply as dislocation but as a practice of critical self-examination" (65).

Similarly, *Half of a Yellow Sun* has been widely interpreted through the lens of national trauma and postcolonial memory, with critics such as Wosu, K. (2018) suggesting that Adichie uses personal narratives to reconstruct fragmented national histories. The novel's exploration of war, loss, and resilience further illustrates her interest in how private lives are shaped by the politics of nation and identity. Adichie's work is thus a rewriting of history as distinct from that which has been created for the African by western logocentrism (131). While set in Nigeria, the novel foreshadows the diasporic and identity-based preoccupations more fully developed in Americanah and her shorter works.

Thematically, these novels are frequently situated within the framework of Homi Bhabha's postcolonial theory, especially his concepts of cultural hybridity and the third space (Bhabha, 1994). Scholars such as Chielozona Eze (2014) have employed Bhabha to explore how Adichie's characters inhabit liminal identities, neither fully assimilated nor entirely detached from their roots. Eze argues that Adichie constructs "an ethical postnational subjectivity," one that resists the binary opposition of home and abroad, self and other. Yet, while Adichie's

novels have been extensively analyzed in relation to postcolonial displacement and the redefinition of belonging, far less attention has been given to how these same themes are rendered with stark clarity and brevity in her short fiction. This gap is particularly evident in the relative critical silence surrounding "The Arrangers of Marriage", a story from *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009), which revisits many of the concerns articulated in *Americanah* but through the lens of a newly arrived immigrant bride discovering cultural erasure in America.

The protagonist of "The Arrangers of Marriage" grapples with similar tensions of identity and assimilation as Ifemelu in *Americanah*, but under the compounded pressures of gender and marital control. While Ifemelu exercises agency by choosing to return to Nigeria, the unnamed protagonist in "The Arrangers of Marriage" is subjected to a male-driven, transactional migration, her husband having "arranged" not only their marriage but her life in America. Scholars such as Rose A. Sackeyfio (2016), while focusing largely on Adichie's novels, note that "Adichie's women often embody the gendered burdens of cultural transition," (23) a point that resonates strongly in this short story.

Despite its brevity, "The Arrangers of Marriage" captures the emotional dissonance and cultural disorientation faced by many diasporic women, particularly those thrust into new identities without consent or preparation. As Ifemelu's journey has been interpreted through Bhabha's third space, so too can the protagonist's constrained identity in "The Arrangers of Marriage" be read as occupying a distorted version of this space, one marked by loss, alienation, and the suppression of cultural memory.

This study, therefore, seeks to bridge the gap between the abundant scholarship on Adichie's novels and the relative paucity of focused critical attention on her short fiction. It argues that "The Arrangers of Marriage", while often overshadowed by the broader narratives of her novels, offers a concentrated and equally compelling exploration of displacement, gendered expectation, and the fragile construction of "home" in the postcolonial diaspora. By bringing theoretical tools often applied to her novels, especially those drawn from Bhabha's postcolonial framework, to bear on this short story, the chapter highlights Adichie's consistent yet diverse engagement with what it means to belong in a world marked by forced movement and fractured identities. In fact, there remains a relative lack of scholarship that treats this story as a central text rather than a peripheral example in broader analyses of Adichie's work. This chapter seeks to address that gap by offering a focused and in-depth analysis of how Adichie

reimagines home and belonging through the unique lens of a female immigrant within the psychological and cultural terrain of diasporic life.

2. **Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in postcolonial theory, diaspora studies, and feminist criticism, with a specific focus on the way cultural identity, displacement, and belonging are negotiated within transnational spaces. In examining Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "The Arrangers of Marriage", the analysis draws heavily on Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of cultural hybridity and the third space, which provide critical insight into the protagonist's negotiation of identity and belonging.

Bhabha (1994) introduces the concept of the third space as a site of cultural negotiation where new identities are formed, arguing that cultural identity is not fixed but constructed in the liminal space between the colonizer and the colonized. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha contends that, "It is in this ambivalence that the concept of cultural identity becomes problematic, and… opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha 4). This notion is instrumental in understanding the protagonist's struggle to assimilate into American society while retaining her Nigerian identity. The third space emerges as a metaphorical zone where cultural dissonance and synthesis occur, particularly for immigrants living dual identities.

The experiences of displacement and cultural dislocation are central to diaspora studies. Stuart Hall (1990) argues that diasporic identities are always in flux, shaped by both historical experiences and ongoing negotiation. E contends that, "Cultural identity… is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being.' It belongs to the future as much as to the past" (Hall 225). This understanding of identity as dynamic rather than static enables a reading of Adichie's protagonist as a figure caught in the tension between cultural preservation and adaptation. The forced marriage, name change, and suppression of native foods and language in "The Arrangers of Marriage" reveal how identity is both imposed and self-fashioned within diasporic settings. Additionally, Paul Gilroy's (1993) *The Black Atlantic* further conceptualizes diasporic identity as formed through "routes" rather than "roots," emphasizing transnational and intercultural exchanges that shape selfhood.

Gender is a crucial lens in this analysis, especially considering the protagonist's experience as a Nigerian woman subject to both patriarchal norms and Western cultural

expectations. Postcolonial feminist critics like Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1988) have criticized monolithic representations of Third World women and advocate for more nuanced, contextualized analyses of gender within postcolonial contexts. Mohanty states: "The relationship between 'Woman', a cultural and ideological composite other, and 'women', real, material subjects of their collective histories, is one of the central questions the practice of feminist scholarship seeks to address" (Mohanty 65). This perspective is pertinent in analyzing the protagonist's limited agency, and how her gender intersects with cultural displacement. The narrative portrays how patriarchal traditions are transposed into the diasporic context, complicating the notion of liberation in the West.

The concept of "home" in diasporic literature is often depicted as a fragmented or shifting idea. Avtar Brah (1996) emphasizes that for diasporic subjects, home is not a fixed geographic location but a "mythic place of desire" and emotional anchoring. Brah explains that: "Home is a lived experience of a locality, its sounds and smells, its heat and dust… But home is also the mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination" (Brah 192). In The Arrangers of Marriage, "home" becomes a contested and evolving space, shaped by gendered expectations, memory, and cultural negotiation. The protagonist's emotional detachment from her new home, and her yearning for self-definition, underscores the fluidity and psychological dimensions of belonging.

Together, these theoretical approaches provide a robust foundation for analyzing "The Arrangers of Marriage". Bhabha's theory of hybridity and the third space facilitates an understanding of the in-betweenness the protagonist occupies; diaspora theory elucidates the complexities of identity and belonging in a transnational context; and postcolonial feminist theory brings attention to the gendered dimensions of displacement and cultural assimilation. This framework enables a clear interpretation of how Adichie critiques both Western and Nigerian patriarchal norms, while redefining "home" as a space of negotiation rather than permanence.

3- Analysis and Discussion

3.1. Formation of a (Fragile) Third Space in "The Arrangers of Marriage"

Adichie's short fiction portrays the story of a newly married Nigerian couple who start their marital life in the U.S.A. While the husband, Ofodile, "an *ezigbo di*! a doctor in America"

(Adichie 170) used to live there, (eleven years), first for studies, then dreams of settling there as an American citizen, Chinaza is a freshly new comer seeking to be integrated into the American mainstream society under the pressing urge of her husband. Chinaza thinks that she will live with a *mis n tmurt* (as we say in Berber language), the son of her homeland, someone like her, from Nigeria and that things will be as they used to be mainly at home, that is, she can speak her own language, eat Nigerian food and act feeling Nigerian.

However, her husband who changes his name in America and goes as Dave to seem more American than Nigerian / African, obliges her to change her name too to Agatha, and undertakes the project of turning her American in spite of her desire to be herself. He declares to her:

> I am not called Ofodile here, by the way. I go by Dave…. you don't understand how it works in this country. If you want to get anywhere you have to be as main stream as possible. If not you will be left by the roadside. You have to use your English name here…you will get used to it baby…when he filled out a Social Security number application for me the next day, the name he entered in bold letters was AGATHA BELL. (Adichie 172).

Furthermore, he asks her to use the expression "it is busy" instead of "it is engaged" (Adichie 170) when referring to the phone line. Chinaza is compelled to adjust her expressions to align with American mainstream language in order to fit into the space her husband constructs for her. This space reflects what Homi Bhabha terms the "third space," where cultural meanings are negotiated and hybrid identities are formed. Dave's efforts to Americanize his African wife go beyond linguistic changes, shaping even her manner of greeting, "say Hi here", and food, "here they don't drink tea with milk", in order to conform to American norms, he intends to reshape her cultural identity through erasing all that is African in her personality.

In front of this dynamic reworking of her cultural identity, Chinaza acquiesces but with great hesitations because she is conscious about the richness of her native culture compared with the American ways. For instance, when she decides to cook a purely Nigerian food, "coconut rice", to satisfy her husband's hanger, she thinks that she is going to win his full appreciation. Even Shirley, their American neighbor, submerged by the sweet smell says, "it smells really good. The problem with us here is we have no culture, no culture at all" (Adichie 179). Her husband eats the plate with ferocity, "smacking his lips like uncle Ike sometimes did

to show aunty Ada how pleased he was with her cooking" (Adichie 179), however; the next day when he comes back home he brings " A *Good Housekeeping All-American Cookbook*, thick as a Bible", saying to her, "I don't want us to be known as the people who fill the building with smells of foreign food" (Adichie 179).

In this excerpt Chinaza prepares coconut rice, a "purely Nigerian food," as a way of expressing care and asserting her cultural identity. Her cooking becomes a symbolic act, an effort to bridge the distance between her heritage and her domestic life in a foreign land. When Shirley, the neighbor, reacts positively, saying "we have no culture, no culture at all", she unknowingly validates the protagonist's cultural expression while simultaneously exposing the perceived cultural emptiness of mainstream American life.

This moment briefly opens a Third Space where Nigerian culture is appreciated, even admired, by the "host" culture. However, this space quickly collapses with the husband's reaction the following day. His gifting of the *Good Housekeeping All-American Cookbook*, and his desire of not being associated with the "smells of foreign food," reflects a deep discomfort with occupying that in-between space. He desires assimilation and respectability within the dominant culture, and thus rejects the hybrid potential of the Third Space in favor of cultural erasure. His actions reveal ambivalence, a key concept in Bhabha's theory. While he enjoys the food and responds emotionally (smacking his lips in a culturally specific way), he is also embarrassed by its public visibility. This highlights the contradictions within diasporic identity: the push to retain cultural roots while simultaneously needing to conform to the norms of the dominant culture. This passage dramatizes the fragile, contested nature of Bhabha's Third Space. Unlike Ofodile, Chinaza the female protagonist, tries to inhabit it, bringing Nigerian culture into an American context, but her husband's rejection shows the pressures of assimilation and the fear of otherness that often destabilize such hybrid identities. The scene speaks about the difficulty of sustaining cultural hybridity in spaces where conformity is rewarded and difference is problematized.

The third space that is collapsing in the eyes of the naïve desperate Nigerian house wife Chinaza is soon going to be reinforced and supported by a black woman, an African American called Nia (who is far from being naïve), and who lives in the next floor. She is the type of independent woman Chinaza aspires to become in her motherland Nigeria. What strikes her about Nia is her desire to recover her African roots. She informs Chinaza that she spent three years in Tanzania and that she changed her American name into an African / Swahili one when

she was eighteen (Adichie 180). Upon hearing her speak about her roots, Chinaza astonishingly speaks to herself saying, "Oh, she a black American, had chosen an African name, while my husband made me change mine to and English one" (Adichie 180). This passage offers a powerful moment of reflection and identity contrast, and when interpreted through Bhabha's theory of the Third Space, it becomes an illustration of both cultural hybridity and the negotiation of selfhood within overlapping postcolonial and diasporic contexts.

In Bhabha's framework, the Third Space is where identities are not merely transmitted or preserved but re-constructed through negotiation, where meanings are contested and cultural signs are translated. It is inherently a space of potential, but also one of instability and conflict, especially when power imbalances are involved. In this passage, Chinaza, a Nigerian immigrant discovering a new cultural environment in America, encounters Nia, an African American woman who has actively sought to reclaim her African heritage. Nia's transformation, after three years spent in Tanzania, adopt a Swahili name, is a conscious act of cultural recovery. For her, the Third Space becomes a site of empowerment, where she can reimagine her identity beyond the legacies of slavery, colonialism, and American racialization.

In stark contrast, Chinaza's own Third Space is shaped by disempowerment and silencing. Her husband's insistence that she abandons her African name for an English one reflects a colonial mimicry, i.e., the desire to conform to the dominant culture in a way that denies her authentic self. This forced erasure of her cultural identity reveals the violence of assimilation, where the Third Space becomes a site of loss rather than liberation. The line, "Oh, she a black American, had chosen an African name, while my husband made me change mine to an English one," encapsulates Chinaza's awakening. It is a moment of realization that identity is negotiable and reclaimable, and that others, even in different diasporic positions, are engaging in acts of resistance and self-definition that she has not yet claimed for herself.

Bhabha's theory insists that hybrid identities are not inherently empowering; their meaning depends on context and power dynamics. Nia's hybrid identity is forged through agency; Chinaza's is imposed upon her. The Third Space here thus becomes a contested *terrain*, Nia thrives in it, while Chinaza is only beginning to recognize its possibilities. This passage marks a turning point in Chinaza's journey, a moment where the Third Space begins to shift from a site of imposed erasure to one of potential self-reclamation. Through Nia's example, Chinaza glimpses a model of identity that embraces cultural multiplicity without shame. In Bhabha's terms, this is the beginning of resistance through hybridity, where Chinaza might

eventually rearticulate herself not as a passive recipient of culture, but as an active participant in its remaking.

3.2. When Patriarchal Norms are Displaced into Diasporic Context

The above-mentioned moment of Chinaza's cultural awakening foregrounds how the Third Space is not merely a cultural intersection, but also a gendered and political terrain, where power, resistance, and self-definition are constantly being negotiated. Chinaza's astonishment, "she, a black American, had chosen an African name, while my husband made me change mine to an English one", reveals the asymmetry in their agency, shaped not only by cultural displacement but also by patriarchal control. Thus, viewed through both Bhabha's and Mohanty's frameworks, this scene highlights how Chinaza's identity is constructed at the intersection of culture, and male power. The marriage itself is the product of both African patriarchal traditions and Nigerian modern economic context that dictates the action to take for a single woman in a search of a rich husband to save her form the socioeconomic miserable context in which "people with master's degrees are roaming the streets jobless" (Adichie 183) as Ofodile declares to Chinaza to defend himself after hiding the truth of his non-consumed marriage with an American woman to obtain legal American citizenship.

Chinaza is an orphan who has been brought up by her aunt Ada and her husband Ike after the death of her parents. Their ultimate objective is to find a husband for her to accomplish the final phase of their noble mission. It sounds like Mrs Bennet in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, yet they really decide to accept Ofodile's mother's proposition of marrying the two despite the emotional and physical distance that separates them. Of course, they mentioned that the gentleman caller is a doctor in America but they have omitted the detail concerning Ofodile's marriage with and American woman, and the fact that he is just an attending physician (student) instead of a consultant. This extract clarifies Chinaza's ironic statement informing the readers that,

The arrangers of marriage only told you that doctors made a lot of money in America. Thay did not add that before doctors started to make a lot of money, they had to do an internship and a residency program, which my new husband had not completed. My new husband told me this during our short in-flight conversation, right after we took off from Lagos, before he fell asleep (Adichie 174).Chinaza was obliged to accept the match because she could not yet provide for an independent life. She works in the bakery of her aunt and though she spent most

of her time working for them she could not built a future of her own because of the family debt she feels for them. In this short fiction, at first glance, Chinaza is presented as one of what Mohanty calls "Third World woman" who is a "a singular, monolithic subject, oppressed, voiceless, and in need of saving" as seen by western feminist critics (Mohanty 333), having no voice or right to accept or reject the chosen husband. Thus, at the outset, Chinaza lacks agency and is denied the right to accept or reject the man chosen to be her husband. The following excerpt expresses this view and all the gratitude she ewes her adoptive parents, "I had thanked them both for everything, finding me a husband, taking me into their home, buying me a new pair of shoes every two years. It was the only way to avoid being called ungrateful", she ionically adds, "I did not remind them that I wanted to take the JAMB exam again and try for the university, that while going to secondary school I had sold more bread in aunty Ada's bakery than all the other bakeries in Enugu sold, that the furniture and floors in the house shone because of me" (170).

Her silence and submission are shaped by the economic circumstances that confine her, as her adoptive parents exploit their guardianship by using her as a tool for their own material advancement. As Mohanty argues, this kind of portrayal reduces women to victims of cultural and economic systems without acknowledging their capacity for resistance or complexity (Mohanty 333). However, the narrative Adichie provides is a fresh new version of the African woman that defies the stereotyped image promoted by some Western feminists, who tend to generalize and consider all non-Western women as one undifferentiated group of victims, rather than recognizing their varied experiences. As Mohanty argues, this kind of feminist discourse often constructs "the average Third World woman" as "ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized," thereby reducing her to a static and homogenous figure (Mohanty 337). In contrast, Chinaza's story portrays a Third World woman in becoming, one who, through discovering a third space, begins to reclaim and strengthen her identity. She is a responsible educated woman who though does not fully succeed to obtain a university degree because of her dedication to work in her aunt's bakery to fulfil her dues in return to their services. Her awakening starts with a growing consciousness of the falsity of the life her new immigrant husband imposes on her in the U.S., and this recognition becomes the first step toward asserting her agency.

Recognition starts by confronting her situation with other women, her neighbors; Shirley and precisely Nia, who is economically independent and successful and lives alone next door. Nia's presence offers a stark contrast to the life Chinaza has been forced into, one marked

by dependence, cultural displacement, and silence. Through their interactions, Chinaza begins to see an alternative model of womanhood, one that challenges the submissive, voiceless role she has internalized. Nia becomes a mirror that reflects what is possible when a woman asserts ownership over her life and choices. This comparative experience functions as a catalyst for Chinaza's self-awareness, pushing her to question the constructed boundaries of tradition, gender, and marriage that have defined her existence. In this way, Adichie does not only destabilize the monolithic image of the "Third World woman" but also emphasizes the importance of cross-cultural female solidarity in fostering transformation and resistance a theme that is focused on in the following section of this chapter.

3.3. Reimagining Home and Belonging in "The Arrangers of Marriage"

Once in America, the apartment of the new husband becomes Chinaza's main space, she becomes the angel of this American house far from her native land Nigeria. The home does not meet her expectations, "I had imagined a smooth driveway snacking between cucumber-colored lawns, a door leading into a hallway, walls with sedate paintings. A house like those of the white newlyweds in the American films thar NTA showed on Saturday nights". Yet, the real apartment was "hot, old, musty smells hung heavy in the air" (Adichie 167), nothing to do with the beforehand imagined fairy setting of the desperate housewives' mansions.

Ofodile / Dave works all the day outside in the hospital and when he comes back home, he should find it functional according to his assimilationist whims of his American dream. Inside the house, Chinaza who wants to create a new room of her own finds herself obliged to go by "Agatha" her English name instead of Chinaza, speak American English and master American recipes instead of traditional Nigerian food. He advocates "absolute Americanism" to borrow Gilroy's terms, "that project a whole and overintegrated idea of self" that Gilroy calls "an absolute or 'cleansed' identity" (20), through a complete erasure of the Nigerian identity that Chinaza cherishes.

In "Roots and Routes: Black Identity as an Outernational Project" (1995) Paul Gilroy challenges essentialist and ethnically absolutist views of identity, arguing instead for a dynamic understanding shaped by movement, hybridity, and the transnational experience of the African diaspora. He rejects the notion that identity must be rooted in a fixed origin or homeland, emphasizing instead the importance of "routes", the historical journeys, displacements, and cultural exchanges that define diasporic life (Gilroy 21). Gilroy highlights cultural forms,

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especially Black music and language, as powerful tools of expression and resistance, revealing how identity is continually reshaped through creativity and survival (25). Finally, he critiques both white and Black nationalisms for their limiting frameworks, advocating instead for an "outernational" (28) vision of solidarity, one that transcends borders and affirms a shared humanity rooted in the complex legacies of colonialism, slavery, and modernity.

Ofodile / Dave, the new husband in the short fiction intends to erase all signs of African, more precisely Nigerian cultural specificities in Chinaza's identity. In other words, the protagonist is pressured by her husband to fully assimilate into American culture, abandoning her Nigerian name, accent, and food. He insists she adopt the name "Agatha Bell" instead of her Igbo name, signaling a deliberate rejection of her cultural identity in favor of American respectability. This reflects a deeper conflict between national identity and the diasporic pressure to conform to Western norms. Her husband's pursuit of legitimacy through hyper-Americanization mirrors Gilroy's critique of narrow nationalistic frameworks, where identity is shaped by rigid borders rather than transnational experience. The story powerfully illustrates the tension between retaining one's cultural roots and conforming to a foreign national identity in the context of diaspora.

Slavery and migration create a shared diasporic memory in the cases Gilroy discusses. Yet, while "The Arrangers of Marriage" does not address slavery directly, it engages deeply with themes of postcolonial displacement and voluntary migration, particularly through the lens of the challenges faced by Nigerians' life in the diaspora. The protagonist's profound sense of alienation in Brooklyn mirrors the kind of disorientation Gilroy associates with the Black Atlantic experience, where individuals are uprooted from familiar cultural contexts and forced to renegotiate their identities in unfamiliar, often unwelcoming, environments. Nevertheless, in the case of Chinaza, it is Ofodile, her Nigerian husband who undertakes the project of uprooting her and then Americanizing his wife as to a adjust to his American dream and mainstream.

The arranged marriage at the center of the story does not function primarily as a romantic union, "it wasn't a real marriage" (Adichie 185), as Nia explains to Chinaza. Instead, it is a transactional pathway to migration, like the one Ofodile arranges with an American woman to have official papers, "to get a Green Card" (Adichie 182), reflecting the way economic and social pressures can shape intimate / personal decisions. It follows that, Adichie's narrative highlights a modern form of displacement, not through forced bondage, but through

the subtler, yet deeply disruptive forces of globalization and postcolonial inequality by revealing how migration can fracture both personal identity and cultural continuity.

Adichie explores the complexities of cultural hybridity within the diasporic experience, corroborating Gilroy's assertion that Black identity is inherently hybrid and formed through cultural fusion. This story dramatizes the conflict between cultural preservation led by Chinaza and her husband's forced assimilation. The protagonist's husband attempts to erase their Nigerian heritage in favor of a sanitized, performative Americanness. His insistence on adopting an American name, accent, and lifestyle reflects a rejection of cultural hybridity in favor of cultural erasure. In contrast, the protagonist resists these pressures, revealing her struggle to maintain Nigerian food, language, and customs as a way of negotiating her own transnational identity. Thus, while training to cook purely American food, she says "we spoke only English now; he did not know that I spoke Igbo to myself while I cooked, that I had taught Nia how to say 'I am hungry' and 'see you tomorrow' in Igbo" (Adichie 182). Her discomfort with the forced suppression of her cultural self illustrates the tensions that arise in diasporic contexts where identities are continuously reshaped.

Furthermore, the presence of other Nigerian immigrants, and black Africans such as Nia, the neighbor who proudly retains her original name, offers alternative models of cultural negotiation that resist the dominant narrative of assimilation. Through these contrasts, Adichie critiques the notion of identity as a binary between origin and destination, instead she advocates for a more organic, self-determined hybridity that allows for the coexistence and mutual influence of multiple cultural identities.

Adichie's "The Arrangers of Marriage" is in line with Gilroy's view of Black identity as a political project rooted in global solidarity and liberation. As a matter of fact, the story portrays the protagonist's gradual movement from isolation and silencing toward self-assertion and communal connection. Initially constrained into a purely domestic life by her husband's authoritarian control and his demand for cultural erasure, Chinaza, right at the beginning of the story experiences a loss of voice and autonomy. However, over the course of the narrative, she begins to reject the patriarchal and assimilationist pressures imposed on her, marking the beginnings of a personal and political awakening triggered by her encounter with the African American Nia who shows her racial pride. Chinaza's eventual reconnection with African diaspora and the reclaiming of her cultural identity suggest a shift toward diasporic solidarity, offering a counter-narrative to individual alienation.

Chinaza becomes aware of the possibility of becoming independent through working when Nia offers to help her find a place in Macey's store where her sister is a manager. After hearing Nia's proposition, Chinaza declares, "something leaped inside me at the thought, the sudden and new thought, of earning what would be mine. Mine" (Adiche 181). Her desire to earn money is not merely practical, it symbolizes a shift toward autonomy in a diasporic space where economic and gender hierarchies often intersect to silence immigrant women. She is no longer aspiring to be saved by Dave but she starts to realize that she can be the architect of her own life through work and reaching out to her community. This transformation reflects a broader critique of both patriarchal dominance and nationalist frameworks that seek to define identity in rigid, hierarchical terms. This potential for empowerment is perceived as a threat by her husband, who attempts to reassert control by discrediting Nia. He warns her against these influences affirming, "Be careful because she [Nia] can be a bad influence" (Adichie 181).

Chinaza made a great decision after hearing the dissimulated marriage of her husband with a white woman for a green card. She packs her clothes in her suitcase and quits the marital home for Nia's apartment as an act of defiance and rebellion. She does not want to stay longer with a man who uses her as another object / means of extending his integration into the American mainstream. He answers her question of "why did you marry me", by saying, "you were light-skinned. I had to think about my children's looks. Light-skinned blacks fare better in America" (Adichie 184). This answer seems to sever any remaining tie of sympathy with Ofodile in the heart of Chinaza who felt offended by her husband's racist beliefs. His answer exposes a disturbing internalization of colorism and racism, suggesting that Chinaza's value does not lie in her personality, intellect, or shared cultural background, but in the shade of her skin. His comment reduces her to a genetic commodity, a tool to secure social advantages in America.

By ending the story with a note of self-determination, Adichie echoes Gilroy's conception of identity as a liberatory and transnational force, showing how the protagonist begins to assert herself not just as a Nigerian, but as a diasporic subject demanding autonomy, respect, and solidarity beyond the confines of nation or gender. This reorientation reflects a critical shift in the way belonging is imagined, not as rooted solely in place, tradition, or social roles, but as something forged through agency and lived experience across borders. Chinaza's refusal to fully conform to either her husband's vision of "Americanness" or the traditional expectations imposed upon her as a Nigerian woman allows her to carve out a hybrid, evolving identity that resists easy categorization.

Chinaza's physical relocation is a symbolic act used by Adichie to challenge monolithic narratives of postcolonial belonging, offering instead a vision that is intersectional and emotionally grounded. Belonging becomes a political and personal act of reclamation, of name, voice, and community, that transcends imposed categories. The story underscores the emotional labor inherent in diasporic life, particularly for women whose identities are shaped by overlapping structures of race, gender, migration, and memory. Chinaza's final gestures of self-assertion move toward the possibility of building a home not through assimilation, but through connection, resilience, and self-recognition. In this way, The Arrangers of Marriage contributes with a vital voice to postcolonial and feminist discourse, expanding our understanding of what it means to belong in a world marked by movement, displacement, and cultural negotiation.

CONCLUSION

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "The Arrangers of Marriage" explores the concept of belonging by tracing the protagonist Chinaza's negotiation of cultural identity within the fraught space of the Nigerian diaspora and American assimilation. Through Chinaza's experience as a recent immigrant and new wife, Adichie illustrates how belonging is not simply a matter of adopting a new culture, but rather a complex, often painful process of identity reconstruction. Chinaza is pressured to erase her Nigerian identity through changing her name, modifying her speech, and adhering to American customs to fit into her husband's vision of success in the U.S. This superficial form of assimilation highlights the tension between external conformity and internal alienation. Chinaza's quiet resistance and eventual assertion of self indicates that true belonging cannot be achieved through self-effacement, but through self-definition that honors one's cultural roots.

Themes of displacement, gender, and tradition are central to this redefinition of "home." Chinaza's physical relocation to America is marked by emotional dislocation, as she is thrust into a marriage arranged under the guise of stability but underpinned by patriarchal control. Her displacement is not only geographic but also psychological, as she struggles to reconcile her sense of self with the roles imposed on her as both a wife and an immigrant. Tradition, particularly around gender and marriage, acts as both a tether to her Nigerian past and a constraint in her new life. However, Adichie reframes "home" not as a fixed geographical or cultural space, but as a fluid and evolving concept rooted in emotional agency, solidarity, and self-respect. Chinaza's journey challenges conventional postcolonial understandings of belonging that often equate it with assimilation or cultural hybridity. Instead, Adichie offers a

feminist, emotionally subtle perspective that situates belonging within acts of resistance, memory, and the ongoing process of claiming one's identity in unfamiliar spaces.

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INDEX

A

Alienation – Emotional and psychological condition experienced by displaced subjects; recurring in analyses of Leïla Sebbar, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

Archives (Diasporic) – Fragmented repositories of memory and identity; theorized as 'living archives' of trauma and renewal (Glissant).

Atlantic (Black Atlantic) – Concept by Paul Gilroy representing diasporic routes and transnational Black identities; explored in the final section on the redefinition of home.

B

Belonging – Central concern of the volume; conceived as dynamic, plural, and relational rather than rooted in geography (Hall; Bhabha).

Black Metropolis – Urban space as a metaphor for Black modernity and mobility (Antonucci).

Border Thinking – Walter Mignolo's term used to describe knowledge emerging from marginal, diasporic, or postcolonial positions.

C

Colonial Legacies – Persistent effects of empire on language, identity, and gender; examined in Sebbar's *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père* and Benhedouga's *La Mise à Nu.*

Cultural Hybridity – Homi Bhabha's concept of identity formed in the 'third space'; appears throughout analyses of Lahiri, Adichie, and Danticat.

Cultural Memory – Collective remembrance shaped by trauma and narrative; central to Sebbar, Danticat, and Djebar.

D

Decolonial Feminism – Strategy combining feminist and anti-imperial critique, as seen in Sebbar's narrative resistance to patriarchal nationalism (Amirouche).

Displacement – Core experience structuring diasporic identity; understood as both trauma and creative possibility.

Diaspora – Defined as a process of movement, transformation, and relation, not a static category (Hall; Glissant; Clifford).

E

Exile (Intellectual and Political) – Explored in readings of Edward Said and Khalifa's and El Akkad's fiction; seen as both loss and insight.

Erasure (Historical and Linguistic) – Colonial suppression of indigenous languages and histories; symbolized in Sebbar's loss of Arabic.

F

Fragmentation – Formal and psychological expression of diasporic life; discussed as a creative mode in *Fragments Against the Grain.*

Female Subjectivity – Central to several chapters (Sebbar, Adichie, Danticat, Evaristo); gendered perspective on migration and belonging.

G

Gender and Diaspora – Intersectional analysis of displacement through female experience (Butler; Brah; Adichie).

Glissant, Édouard – Poetics of Relation; cited as theoretical basis for identity as relational and non-hierarchical.

Globalization – Contextual backdrop shaping transnational identities in contemporary diasporic writing.

H

Hall, Stuart – Cultural Identity and Diaspora; foundational text shaping the book's vision of identity as 'a matter of becoming as well as being.'

Home (Redefinition of) – Not a fixed place but a performative, imaginative, and narrative construct.

Hybridity – Creative negotiation between cultures; presented as method and aesthetic.

I

Identity (Postcolonial and Transnational) – Continuously remade through displacement, memory, and narrative (Hall; Bhabha; Maalouf).

In-betweenness – The condition of living 'between roots and routes'; synonymous with diasporic existence.

Intersectionality – Analytical approach linking gender, race, and displacement, especially in Danticat and Adichie.

L

Language and Silence – Key to Sebbar's diasporic identity crisis; language as both heritage and site of alienation.

Loss and Recovery – Dual movement characterizing diasporic memory; narrative as the act of reclaiming what history erases.

M

Memory (Collective and Personal) – Aesthetic and ethical tool for reconstructing history in exile; a recurrent motif throughout.

Migration – Material and symbolic axis of all narratives; understood as shaping the modern subject.

Modernity (Postcolonial) – Condition of fractured belonging and cultural reconfiguration following colonial disruption.

N

Namelessness – Symbolic anonymity as explored in Lahiri's *Whereabouts*; represents alienation and freedom.

Narrative as Survival – Literature's role in transforming trauma into resilience; writing as a mode of existence.

Nationalism (Postcolonial Critique of) – Seen as exclusionary and patriarchal; resisted by diasporic voices.

P

Partial Belongings – Concept by Avtar Brah emphasizing plural and fluid identity; embraced in Danticat and Adichie's work.

Postcolonial Inheritance – The persistence of colonial structures in cultural memory and subjectivity.

Poetics of Relation – Glissant's theory framing diaspora as interconnectedness rather than origin.

R

Race and Racialization – Explored through African and Afro-diasporic writing (Gilroy; Evaristo; Adichie).

Routes vs. Roots – Dual metaphor of movement and attachment; defines diasporic identity.

Relational Identity – The notion that selfhood emerges through interaction, translation, and exchange.

S

Silence and Voice – Dialectic between suppression and expression; literature as restoration of silenced histories.

State Collapse – Context of exile explored in Khalifa and El Akkad; literature as record of political and emotional fragmentation.

Storytelling – Act of resistance and re-creation; a method for transforming fragmentation into relation.

T

Third Space – Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity and negotiation; central analytical tool across chapters.

Trauma (Colonial and Diasporic) – Emotional and transgenerational effect of displacement; particularly evident in Sebbar and Black Atlantic writings.

Transnationalism – Framework describing literary and cultural circulation beyond nation-states.

W

Water (Motif) – Symbol of trauma, transformation, and renewal in Black Atlantic literature (Evaristo, Gyasi).

Women and Migration – Gendered lens of diasporic identity; recurring theme in Adichie, Sebbar, and Danticat.

Between Roots and Routes

Narratives of Diaspora, Identity, and Belonging

Dr. Nassima Amirouche

Between Roots and Routes is a significant contribution to the fields of postcolonial studies, diaspora studies, and comparative literature. It offers a nuanced, theoretically sophisticated, and geographically diverse exploration of how individuals and communities navigate identity in a world defined by movement. The book successfully demonstrates that the tension between roots and routes is not a problem to be solved but a generative space where new understandings of self, community, and belonging are continuously forged. It is an essential resource for scholars and students interested in the enduring power of literature to make sense of displacement and imagine more inclusive futures.

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