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LIMINALITY AND BEYOND: Conceptions of In-betweenness in American Culture and Literature

Editors
Agnieszka Mobley, Blossom N. Fondo, Iwona Filipczak

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Zielona Góra 2020

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INTRODUCTION

Recent theories explain that any cultural encounter engenders the particular and, more often than not, peculiar condition of in-betweenness. Even in the past, when the immigrants faced the assimilative pressures within the American society, their identity could hardly be discussed in essentializing terms. The condition of in-betweenness affected political, cultural, emotional, familial, professional, and many other spheres of life. A number of social critics and cultural theoreticians have coined variegated terms regarding the condition of in-betweenness experienced by the representatives of certain cultural groups in attempt to redefine their identities in American society.

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. DuBois referred to double consciousness as a peculiar sense of the need to perceive oneself through the prisms of others. The self-esteem of Black Americans, in other words, was likely to depend on the way they were perceived by the mainstream, i.e. white, dominant society. DuBois's employment of the concepts of "two souls, two thoughts, two reconciling strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body" implied, at first glance, the sense of inner conflict or even schizophrenic state of mind. The assimilative pressures that black people underwent destabilized the original self. On the other hand, double consciousness, bearing in mind recent definitions of cultural identities, can be considered more constructively, underlying the awareness of one's complex and at the same time rich identity that one develops in the process of creative fusion of different cultural heritages.

In the late 1930s, Irvin Child researched the responses of second-generation of Italian Americans in New Haven, Connecticut, to the assimilative pressures that involved the redefinition of Italian ethnic identity. He defined the "rebel reaction," as denial of unique Italian ethnicity upon the inculcation of the mainstream American conviction of Italian inferiority. On the contrary, the "in-group reaction" stood for strong affirmation of Italian identity. The "apathetic reaction," in turn, was an equivalent of the sense of in-betweenness as it entailed neither detachment from nor particular connectedness with Italian culture.

What we experience nowadays is a globalized "migrant" culture, in which the surplus of connectivities dismantles the sense of a coherent, bounded identity. Theories of Homi K. Bhabha addressing mainly the colonial and postcolonial background can be easily applied to transnational culture of migrants and people displaced for various reasons. In *The Location of Culture* Bhabha tries to explore the question of new

identities formation and introduces a notion of an international culture "not based on exoticism or multi-culturalism of the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of the culture's hybridity", which he calls the "Third Space." A theorist of globalization, Arjun Appadurai prefers to speak of a global culture without discernible center and periphery, characterizing it as a culture of flows and fluid identities, which enables frequent cultural encounters and which brings into proximity cultural elements of disparate stable structures, which may often lead to hybridizing cultures.

Considering this global migrant culture, it would be appropriate to underscore that the condition of the migrant is the condition of in-betweenness; which emphasizes the constant process of becoming. This collection is therefore interested in responding to such questions as: what are the configurations of in-betweenness in American literature? What new forms are created, and which ones are lost in this culture of contact? In what ways and to what effect does American literature dramatize the concept of the "melting pot?"

Erin Bell approaches the paratextual elements in Tillie Olsen's "O Yes" as a reflection of the American dilemma of the "color line" in the middle of the 20th century. She shows how the formal divisions constructed by spacing and typography mirror racial bifurcation and the marginalization of black people within the mainstream American society. Her reading of this strong connection between the form and content accentuates the interrelatedness between the short story's context and the external reality.

Alena Cicholewski looks at a medium of a comic book to investigate the identity of the protagonist of *Ms. Marvel* comic book series through the lens of Homi Bhabha's theories. She discusses the cultural in-betweenness of the character of Kamala Khan, a Muslim Pakistani American teenager endowed with superhero abilities, and draws attention to the protagonist's negotiations of identity, which are interpreted as resistance to the Westernized notions of beauty and signal the character's empowerment, the features which ultimately have led to the widespread recognition of this superhero of color.

Undertaking a reading of Lawrence P. Jackson's *My Father's Name*, **Yapo Ettien** explores the profound oppression experienced by blacks who were objectified and dehumanized in the Postbellum American South. He notes how this was preconditioned on the racialization of American slavery whereby notable differences between blacks and whites were foregrounded to serve as a basis for racial hierarchization. This to him created an inferior 'Other' of the blacks and justified the myriad abusers to which they were subjected.

Iwona Filipczak explores the complexity of US identities affected by global flows rendered in Bharati Mukherjee's *Leave It To Me*, indicating the currency of deterritorialized lives, which remain in a complex net of transnational connectivities and dependencies. The discussion exposes the influence of ethnoscapes and mediascapes

on the human imagination and, in the result, on the formation of modern subjectivities and creation of imagined communities as forms of belonging.

Blossom N. Fondo expounds on the condition of in-betweenness attendant upon the cultural displacement of Native Americans. Reading from Silko's *Ceremony,* she traces the identity disintegration of Native Americans faced with the cultural oppression of whites. This, she notes, places them in the traumatic condition of straddling two contradictory worlds.

For her part, **Paulina Korzeniewska-Nowakowska** in her article examines the role of sports dramas in promoting the tropes of white savior narratives. This, she underscores, proffers a biased understanding of the experiences and identity formation process of ethnic minorities. Drawing from Hopkin's *Race,* Caro's *McFarland, USA,* and Hancock's *The Blind Side*, she explains how characters are developed to fit into the pattern of a white savior who saves supporting characters usually of a black or Hispanic descent thus, promoting the notion of these ethnic minority characters being unable to save themselves without white intervention.

Agnieszka Mobley reveals a crosswise, unceasing process of Italian-American identity formation depicted in *Sometimes I Dream in Italian* by Nina Ciresi. The presented characters never attain complete self-integrity in the American cultural realm, where they feel the need to, or are compelled to, employ either Italian or American norms and value systems in variegated decisions regarding their existence. This, additionally, oscillates around three major referents of race, gender, and class.

Michaela Weiss's article is a reminder that the concepts of liminality and hybridity are not tied exclusively to ethnic or postcolonial literatures but are, in fact, universal notions, and can be traced in the writing of acclaimed mainstream American writers. Accordingly, in her analysis of Elizabeth Bishop's poetry she focuses predominantly on the poetess's strategies of creating poetic landscapes which are geographical as well as psychological and spiritual, and which reflect Bishop's own life-long liminal negotiations between an outsider and a local.

Diane Zeeuw, in her analysis of Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me*, investigates the function of the brown body as a "thirdspace," a category defined by Edward Soja. She enquires into a cultural and material nature of the racialized brown body. The connotation of whiteness with superiority and contradictory associations of blackness with compliance and violence engender the continued, as Zeeuw exposes, inter-racial and intra-racial violence.

Editors

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Liminality and Beyond: Conceptions of In-betweenness in American Culture and Literature

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FROM THE SPACES BETWEEN: PARATEXTUAL ELEMENTS AS A MODE OF RESISTANCE IN TILLIE OLSEN'S SHORT STORY "O YES"

"What is the unspoken saying? What does it mean?
To what extent is dissimulation a way of speaking?"
– Pierre Macherey

In his important text, *A Theory of Literary Production* (1966) quoted above, French literary theorist Pierre Macherey notes the ambivalent qualities of silence. Although conventional wisdom suggests silence as an absence of expression, Macherey posits that silence can also be a *presence*, arguing that evoking silence is not necessarily a passive act but also a means of resistance. In this essay, I would like to consider spacing between the words in a literary text as a form of silence. This theoretical groundwork allows for a nuanced understanding of how American author Tillie Olsen employs textual silences, or spaces, within her short fiction to call attention to problematic, racist ideologies present in America during the mid-twentieth century. As such, this essay analyzes Olsen's short story "O Yes" (1961) to illustrate how Olsen's innovative use of spacing and other elements serve as a means of critiquing oppressive systems of power.[1]

It makes sense to begin this analysis by considering how to categorize these textual spaces—or silences—in works of literature. How should an extra space on the page be classified? What should we call a typographical element that is so small it may be overlooked by the untrained eye? Coined by French literary theorist Gérard Genette, the term "paratext" is best-suited to classify such textual elements. According to Genette, paratext includes the many components that frame a literary work, including a book's cover, prologue, index, epilogue, dedication, and so forth. Arguably, typography, margins, and the spacing or justification of the text within a work of literature is also paratextual. In spite of their prominent placement in a book, paratextual features are sometimes ignored and overlooked by readers. Beth A. McCoy argues that this "matrix

1 "O Yes" was first published as "Baptism" in the literary journal *Prairie Schooner* in 1957. It was later re-titled and included Olsen's collection of short fiction *Tell Me in a Riddle* (1961). In the essay, I have tried to represent Olsen's text as close to the original publication as possible. Any non-standard spacing between words of non-standard line breaks are purposeful.

of spaces" is "frequently unnoticed and even disdained" (156). Conversely, paratextual components can shape a reader's entire interpretation of a text. According to Genette and Marie Maclean, the paratext helps to make a book "present" and "to assure its presence in the world, its 'reception' and its consumption" (261). Genette and other scholars also describe the paratext in relationship to borders and border-crossings. Genette and Maclean argue that paratextual items are at the "fringes" of the book, suggesting paratext is "an undecided zone" which is "between the inside and the outside" (261). This definition gestures toward the liminality or in-between-ness of paratextual elements. Because of the paratext's classification as an undecided and marginal zone, the paratext has been a topic of analysis for those who study gender, sexuality, and race.

Many contemporary scholars, in fact, have developed understandings of paratext in relationship to oppressive structures of power. Some readings of paratext figure it in terms of dominance and submission—that is, the paratext is considered "subservient" to the dominant, primary narrative. American literary critic J. Hillis Miller brings focus to the prefix "para," noting it signifies exteriority. For Miller, "para" indicates "a thing which is situated at once on this side and on that of a frontier, of a threshold or of a margin, of equal status and yet secondary, subsidiary, subordinate, like a guest to his host, a slave to his master" (219). Such an entity, according to Miller, "is not only at once on both sides of the frontier which separates the exterior and the interior; it is also the frontier itself, the screen which creates a permeable membrane between the inside and the outside" (219). Interiority and exteriority are key terms in discussions regarding the limited scope of the Western literary canon; such conversations explore how women's experiences have been both inside and outside of written histories, reminding us that women writers have been frequently marginalized, suppressed, or ignored.

In addition to reading the paratext in relationship to gender, there are also implications for analyzing paratext as a means of resistance against racist ideologies. Beth McCoy reads the paratext as a space of liberation for African-American authors, arguing that, "the paratext is territory important, fraught, and contested. More specifically, its marginal spaces and places have functioned centrally as a zone transacting ever-changing modes of white domination and of resistance to that domination" (156). Paradoxically (and perhaps because this space *is* over-looked), the same site that has been ignored becomes a locus for confronting ideologies that silence or misunderstand minority voices. In "O Yes," Tillie Olsen calls attention to the breakdown in communication between black and white people through her use of spacing between the words and other paratextual elements in the stories. Olsen's textual spaces serve as visual reminders of the racial divide in America as well as allude to how expressions from marginalized people were perpetually silenced by racist ideologies and government policies.

In her book *Silences* (1974), Olsen explores the numerous ways silence pervades women's writing, distinguishing between what she calls "natural" and "unnatural" literary silences in the work of female authors. Olsen calls attention to how the literary canon celebrates white, male authors whilst overlooking female writers. She declares this omission a "silence," and discusses numerous other "hidden silences" in the field of literature; there are numerous works composed by women that have been "aborted deferred, [and] denied" (8). These silences, according to Olsen, often occur when a female author's writing is waylaid by heteronormative roles prescribed for them such as marriage, motherhood, and other domestic responsibilities. In *Silences*, Olsen draws on her own life and literary experiences to develop claims about how political, economic, and social forces silenced many female literary voices.[2]

While Olsen offers a robust discussion of silences in her non-fiction, she uses textual silences (spacing and pauses) in her short story "O Yes" to consider how black voices have been systematically suppressed in America. Such paratextual elements in Olsen's story function as a form of literary mimesis, reflecting the limits and boundaries set by racial and economic hierarchies in the United States. That is, Olsen's irregular and non-standard spacing between lines, words, and paragraphs reflects the gaps and separations between black and white people in America. Olsen's narrative style is often broken and fragmented, making the story difficult to decipher. These difficulties mirror the chasm in communication between racial groups in mid-twentieth century America that continue to resonate today.

In short, Olsen employs a number of paratextual elements in "O Yes" to describe a fading friendship between two teenaged girls: Parialee, who is black, and Carol, who is white. The demise of their friendship also serves as an allegorical critique of racist ideologies and segregation policies present during the time the story was published. "O Yes" begins at Parialee's baptism, a ceremony that signifies her transition into an adult member of the church. The sub-plot of the story echoes the primary one in that it explores the girls' transition into high school and the adult American society which forbids such inter-racial friendships. As Rebekah Edwards notes in the foreword to Olsen's *Tell Me A Riddle* collection, the two are, "forced apart by the formal and informal tracking of the American public school system of the 1950s, and by the systematic racial segregation that it supports" (*xv*). Several characters in the story reiterate this viewpoint, implying the impossibility of the girls' friendship in a segregated society, but

2 Though her career began in the 1930s and lasted well into the latter part of the 20th century, Olsen's résumé is punctuated by a number gaps in between publications. She began her one and only novel, *Yonnondio from the Thirties*, in the 1930s, but it remained unfinished and unpublished for four decades until she completed it in 1974.

Carol's mother Helen offers an optimistic reflection at the end of the story, visualizing a future in which the girls may rekindle their friendship.

As noted earlier, the story is comprised of fragmented and overlapping narratives. The cacophonous quality of the narrative occasionally renders it difficult to follow, but the plurality of voices in the story reflects the various dialects present in mid-twentieth century America, many of which were ridiculed or suppressed. Part One of "O Yes" is told from Carol's perspective as she observes Parialee's baptism ceremony. This event appears to be the first time Carol has visited her friend's church—which is an exclusively black congregation. Carol and her mother, "are the only white people…sitting in the dimness of the Negro church that had once been a corner store" (43). Shortly after the opening of the story, readers experience a dissonant churning of songs and screams filtered through Carol's perception. Carol's impression of the house of worship is cloaked in her fear and misunderstanding, signifying her exotification of the church members as well as latent prejudices.

Carol's thoughts about the church cast it in increasingly violent terms as the narrative moves forward, describing the first sounds she hears as, "powerful throbbing voices" (43). Later, Carol hears "ladders of screamings" and "drumming feet of ushers running;" Parialee's mother Alva is described as "chanting" (44). Such word choices correspond with stereotypical imaginings of African mysticism and tribal magic common in racist stereotypes prevalent at the time of publication. The intensity of the service is overwhelming for Carol, though she is surrounded by people who love and care about her, including Parialee, her mother Alva, and Carol's own mother, Helen. The frenetic vocalizations and energetic worship of the church members overload Carol's senses and she almost faints during the service, granting her a ready excuse to exit the church shortly thereafter. Though the majority of Part One of the story is told from Carol's perspective, it meaningfully closes in the reflective thoughts of Alva, Parialee's mother.

In Part One of "O Yes," Olsen uses paratextual elements to indicate themes of separation between races in America. The spacing in the text symbolically indicates the rifts in the social fabric of the country during the time the story is set. As the story unfolds, Carol's stream-of-consciousness narrative reveals that she and Parialee—whom she used to affectionately call Parry—have been friends since early childhood. Sitting next to Parialee in the warm church evokes pleasant memories from the past, and demonstrates how the two friends used to share a common childhood language that transcended their differences. In the church, Parialee's arm feels "so warm" to Carol that before she realizes it, she has started up "the old game from grade school, drumming a rhythm on the other's arm to see if the song could be guessed" (39). In the past, the two girls were so intimate that differences in their race did not seem to change or influence their

affection for one another. As the sermon commences, Carol slips into a sleepy reverie of childhood memories about shared rhymes and play:

> O voice of drowsiness and dream to which Carol does not need to listen. As long ago. Parry warm beside her too, as it used to be, there in the classroom of Mann Elementary…And as the preacher's voice spins happy and free, it is the used-to-be play-yard. Tag. Thump of the volley ball. Ecstasy of the jump rope. Parry, do pepper. Carol, do pepper. Parry's bettern Carol, Carol's bettern Parry…
>
> *Did someone scream?* (43)

This scream shakes Carol out of her recollections. Though she is seated next to her best friend and her own mother, Carol is afraid and disoriented, hinting at her prejudices but also denoting that the powerful emotions expressed in the church are too much for her to endure; the bare emotion of the service is unfamiliar. The passage above demonstrates several of the paratextual elements that Olsen employs throughout the story, including a lack of quotation marks, the use of italics to indicate the internal monologue of a character, and a non-standard ellipses to indicate a passage in time (four periods rather than three). Such paratextual elements highlight Carol's feelings of disorientation; the shock of the scream and the non-standard type-setting jolt readers out of the quiet childhood memory. The passage ends in a question, rather than in a definitive statement, alluding to a trope of misunderstanding which is present throughout the story. Did Carol *really* hear a scream, or is it simply fervent, passionate worship? In this scene and several others throughout the text, readers are left with such queries.

While the moment described above highlights the bond that the two girls formerly shared, Olsen's use of vernacular speech in the story calls attention to the emerging rift between Carol and Parialee. While Carol speaks in American Standardized English, Parialee has a "new way she likes to talk" (40). Parialee's "jive talk" or African American Vernacular English (A.A.V.E.) alienates Carol and makes her feel out of place. Her feelings are complicated by the fact that Carol is concerned that someone from school might see her at the church. As the narrator explains, "The youth choir claps and taps to accent the swing of it. Beginning to tap, Carol stiffens. 'Parry, look. Somebody from school.' 'Once more once,' says Parialee, in the new way she likes to talk now. 'Eddie Garlin's up there. He's in my math'" (38). Later, as Carol is leaving the church, Parialee calls her a "little ol' consolation prize" and tells her there is, "no need to cuss and fuss. You going to be sharp as a tack, Jack" (45). Parry's comments are a bit glib, considering her best friend "almost fainted" during the emotional worship session, but perhaps Parialee views the "almost" fainting spell as a ruse or quick means to leave the service.

The story's consideration of expression extends beyond the conversations between Carol and Parialee. For Carol, the voices of the parishioners are swirling dissonance; their songs fuse together and in their disharmony sound ominous. Carol thinks that if

the sounds of the service were a record, "she would play it over and over" in order to "untwine the intertwined voices, to search how the many rhythms rock apart and yet are one glad rhythm" (38-9). Constance Coiner explores the significance of the multiple perspectives in the story, explaining that:

> unless readers/listeners make connection among a variety of voices, many of which are foreign to their own, the potential for genuine democracy latent within the cacophony of heteroglossia is lost. If they remain unconnected from each other, the competing voices lapse into a white-noise excess of sound that becomes unintelligible. (72)

The narrative structure of the story uses overlapping phrases and voices to present a heteroglossia found in American culture, and these overlapping voices demonstrate the disconnection between Parialee and Carol's different cultural and social groups as well as society at large.

In the text, Olsen also describes such instances of "white-noise" as rushing water. Carol's feelings are likened to drowning, a metaphor with multiple, weighted resonances. The water evokes the ritual cleansing of baptism, but likewise alludes to the perilous waters of the Atlantic as Africans were kidnapped and transported by force across the Middle Passage against their will. At the beginning of the narrative, the baptismal tank "gleams" and is described as if it is "pouring from the ceiling, the blue painted River of Jordan" (37). As the story progresses, the water imagery evokes feelings of danger rather than serenity. The water that Carol envisions in the church is not symbolic of resurrection, but of death and drowning. Carol thinks of the service as, "bubbling, swelling, seething" (39). Such signifiers insinuate a tumultuous ocean and the swelling and seething becomes too much for Carol to endure. She is overwhelmed, glimpsing "the white hands of the ushers, fanning, foam in the air; the blue-painted waters of Jordan well and thunder; Christ spirals on his cross in the window—and she is drowned under the sluice of the slow singing and the sway" (44). Like a dam about to burst, the "sluice" of the service is powerful, pushing down on Carol.

While Olsen demonstrates Carol's anxiety through paratextual elements, her use of such elements throughout the story indicate a politics of space that questions racial hierarchies in mid-century America. Another example of such a paratextual element occurs when Carol scans the interior of the church and a gold-lettered sign catches her eye (38). Lines from the *Bible* (John 14:6) are represented as demonstrated:

REJOICE
D L
O IS O
G V
E
I AM THE WAY THE TRUTH THE LIGHT

While the quotation could be interpreted as an illustration, the configuration of this representation is more complex, reflecting an acknowledgement and critique of the structures of power that frame American society. If one tries to read the sign from line to line, the letters seem to be in no particular order and are meaningless. In order to see what the sign says, one has to back up and look at the bigger picture—one has to take in the black letters set against the white background. The challenge of reading the lines highlights themes of misunderstanding which permeate the text. The shape of this sign—the pyramid—again reflects a hierarchal structure that echoes American society where a only a few are at the top of the structure; and like the Egyptian pyramids, America too, was built via slave labor.

This textual illustration profoundly demonstrates how paratextual elements such as typography carry meaning beyond what is written. As Frank Serafini and Jennifer Clausen argue, "typography of written language not only serves as a conduit of verbal narrative," but "serves as a visual element and semiotic resource with its own meaning potentials" (2). This pyramid-shaped arrangement of letters is such a resource with its own potential. Serafini and Clausen also describe typography as a "mode" that can be used for "a range of social purposes. Each mode does different semiotic work and communicates or represents meanings in different ways. Visual images, design elements, written language and photography for example all use different material and semiotic resources to represent meanings" (3). Throughout "O Yes," Olsen uses such elements to generate meaning beyond what is indicated at the sentence level; many of the pages take on an illustrative quality that alludes to the marginalization of people of color in America.

As the narrative continues, Olsen employs non-standard spacing to signify the preacher's call and the choir and congregation's responses back to him. The spacing of these passages evokes a rhythmic quality that falls on the ears like the ebb and flow of waves. The breaks between the lines replicate the cadences and the back-and-forth between the preacher and his church. Readers experience the sway of the sermon through Olsen's use of non-standard line breaks. Listeners may come to embody the rhythm of the sermon and so there is a performative as well as symbolic quality to the paratextual elements. At the beginning of the sermon, the pastor's call and the choir's responses intersperse the text—interrupting Carol's thoughts as demonstrated in the following passage:

> Singing, little Lucinda Phillips fluffs out her many petticoats; singing, little Bubbie bounces up and down on his heels.
>
> *Any day now I'll reach that land of freedom,*
> *Yes, o yes*
> *Any day now, know that promised land.* (38)

The spacing in this passage isolates the brief lines of the preacher from the greater text. The space around the words calls attention to them but segregates them from others, representing how the expressions of people like the preacher are also sequestered and alienated. Because there is no period bringing the sentence to a full stop, however, the call for freedom reverberates and lingers. Though the second half of this passage appears to indicate the preacher's voice, Olsen does not use quotation marks and thus, these words are not attributed to one person, rather they become a form of communal discourse, spoken by all. It is not clear if these words are being sung by the choir, Bubbie, or if they are spoken by the preacher as part of his invocation. Additionally, the last three lines of the passage, like many other refrains in African-American spirituals, indicate a coded, double message. The "land of freedom" refers to religious salvation—or a heavenly afterlife as the ultimate respite from oppression—but the words also gesture towards the anticipation for equality in America. Like Carol, readers also must "untwine" what they read and hear, and listen closely to make sense of the passage's multiple implications.

As the story moves on, the sermon picks up velocity, and Olsen continues to use non-standard spacing to set off the religious phrases of the church members from Carol's thoughts. What appear to be the preacher's words spliced with the choir's responses take over several pages of the story. The titular phrase "O Yes" is frequently repeated and in passages such as the following, Olsen refrains from using quotation marks or attributions, which results in a communal quality of the sermon:

> Yes. He raised up the dead from the grave. He made old death behave.
> *Yes. Yes.* From all over, hushed. *O Yes*
> He was your mother's rock. Your father's mighty tower. And he gave us a little baby. A little baby to love. (42)

The spacing in the passage above also brings attention to structures of grammar and how some forms of speech are alienated or ignored by those in power. The irregular spacing and lack of punctuation marks break rules regarding "standard" English punctuation. Such paratextual elements point toward a number of important considerations about race, voice, and expression. First, the dialogue between preacher and congregants eventually overtakes the entire narrative for several pages. While minority voices are often ignored and suppressed by those in power, at the textual level, the voices of black people int the story have ample space to express themselves, such as shown in the following:

> Yes
> And that burden you been carrying – ohhhhh that burden – not for always will it be. No, not for always.
> *Stay with me, Lord*

> I will put my Word in you and it is power. I will put my Truth in you and it is power.
>
> O Yes
>
> Out of your suffering I will make you to stand as a stone. A tried stone. Hewn out of the mountains of ages eternal.
> Ohhhhhhhhhhh. Out of the mire I will lift your feet. Your tired feet from so much wandering. From so much work and wear and hard times.
>
> *Yes* (42-3)

While some paratextual elements are ignored, the ones in these passages are difficult to overlook.

The preacher's words resist being limited to one line or to following the rules of "proper" line breaks, indicating another important implication. The preacher's voice does not comply to the standards of punctuation set by white authors and grammarians, and thus, his voice is outside of such bounds and limitations. His voice breaks free from the prison-house of grammar, it supersedes it. The sermon's lack of proper punctuation also hints at another critical idea about race and voice. The passage resonates with the famous words of feminist and civil rights activist Audre Lorde, who notes, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change" (112). Here, Lorde asserts that people of color in America will need to use their own modes of expression to take on the oppressive political schema. The storefront church serves as a celebration of black speech acts which oppose the grammar and speech of those in power.

While such passages of the story indicate the subjectivity of the preacher and his congregation, Carol's viewpoint concurrently disrupts and demonizes those voices. Much of Carol's inner monologue exotifies the black people in the church; her thoughts reveal racist imagery that portray the black congregation as ferocious and violent in their worship, even though she is best friends with a black girl. This incongruency parallels an incorrect and enduring myth about racism which is, as John Eligon states, the notion that "proximity to blackness immunizes white people from having attitudes that are rooted in racism or doing racist things" (6) In Carol's mind, as noted, most of the events of the service are framed as being animalistic or violent, even though she is there with her best friend. In her Carol's mind, the moans in the church are followed by a "lunge of shriek," a "thrashing" noise, and a "trembling wavering scream" (47). The piano is imbued with its own violent streak, thought of by Carol as, "whipping, whipping air to a froth" (47). Carol's thoughts also reflect what African-American scholar and civil rights activist W.E.B. DuBois importantly denotes as the "color line" in his seminal text *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). Though Carol and Parialee have been

friends since they were small children, Carol is not familiar with Parialee's community; she seems to exotify the congregants and is apparently scared of them, illustrative of how the color line creates boundaries and barriers between black and white people.

DuBois' concept of the color line referred to, of course, the physical and geographic barriers between black and white people in the Jim Crow-era south, evidenced in segregated schools, shopping areas, restaurants, and other public spaces. As DuBois theorized, though the color line constructs such obvious forms of racist barriers, the color line also generates more concealed modes of racial segregation. Building on DuBois' conception of the color line, Heather M. Dalmage coins the term "borderism" to describe the experience of living near to and negotiating the color line. "Borderism," she writes, "is a unique form of discrimination faced by those who cross the color line, do not stick with their own, or attempt to claim membership (or are placed by others) in more than one racial group" (40). Both Parialee and Carol have been crossing the color line, inhabiting a borderland space, but the events of the story signify that their crossings will end soon as each of the girls transition into a new stage in their lives. Carol's white privilege allows her to step into Parialee's world, while the reverse would not be likely.

In the story, the service reaches its climax, resulting in an intense montage of sounds and images. It is difficult to decipher who is saying or thinking what by the end of this passage. The moans that Carol hears are described as war cries and she feels suffocated. As the text outlines, "The voices in great humming waves, slow, slow (when did it become humming?), everyone swaying with it too, moving like in slow waves and singing, and up where Eddie is, a new cry, wild and open" (48). The intensity is too much for Carol, and in a moment of wish fulfillment, "she is drowned under the sluice of the slow swinging and the sway (48). In these final moments of the service, the narrative becomes disjointed, grotesque, and bizarre, and then: "Shhhhh. You almost fainted, lambie"(49). This comment shakes Carol out of her stupor and reminds readers that she is in a safe and supportive space. Situated next to her mother, her best friend and her best friend's mother, Carol is surrounded by caring individuals. Alva, Parialee's mother, gently holds a cup up to Carol's mouth, encouraging her to drink. Alva faults herself for Carol's reaction. "I blames myself for not paying attention," says Alva. "You not used to people letting go that way" (46). "You not used to hearing what people keeps inside, Carol" (46). Indeed, Carol's response might not be simply explained as latent racism. Perhaps the power of the emotional release and response was simply too overwhelming for Carol to endure. It is not that Carol is scared of the people, but stunned by the pain they express within the service. Perhaps, Carol, like many other white people, is oblivious to the fear and agony that black people in America suffer through. While such torment is part of the everyday experience for the congregation,

such suffering has not been audible nor visible to Carol until the moments in the church. The outpouring of pain and suffering that Carol hears in this space leads to an affective experience that is too much for her to bear.

Though most of the story in Part One is comprised of Carol's thoughts, the final moments of the section segue into Alva's inner reflection. This stream-of-consciousness narrative explores Alva's connection to the church, which comprises close to a full page. Her thoughts are presented in italics in one single, lengthy block of text. By closing Part One, Alva reclaims the space of the story (and the church) for herself and for the other worshippers. While Carol has interpreted the sounds in the church as frightening and violent, the communal space is Alva's source of strength. Alva's long consideration of the support the church community provides reveals her personal struggles as well as those of the community of black women. She recalls:

> *When I was carrying Parry and her father left me, and I fifteen years old, one thousand miles away from home, sin-sick and never really believing, as still I don't believe all, scorning, for what have it done to help, waiting there in the clinic and maybe sleeping, a voice called: Alva, Alva. So mournful and so sweet: Alva. Fear not, I have loved you from the foundation of the universe.* (47)

In this passage, Olsen reveals why the church is so important to Alva and other women. Alone, and a single, teenaged mother, Alva turned to this community where she could give voice to her pain.

Alva's long reflection contrasts surreal, grotesque images with those of salvation and strength. The section alludes to how black women like Alva must balance their maternal duties with the terror of living in racist America, such as demonstrated below:

> *And a little small child tugged on my dress. He was carrying a parade stick, on the end of it a star that outshined the sun. Follow me, he said. And the real sun went down and he hidden his stick. How dark it was, how dark. I could feel the darkness with my hands. And when I could see, I screamed. Dump trucks run, dumping bodies in hell, and a convey line run, never ceasing with souls, weary ones having to stamp and shove them along, and the air like fire. Oh I never want to hear such screaming.* (47)

The images of dumped bodies indicate spiritual torture, but also evoke those of brutalized bodies that were tortured and abused in the Antebellum South and well into the segregation era and beyond. The conveyer belt insinuates the objectification of black bodies as property, not persons, and this moment reveals the specter of violence present in the minds of black mothers in America living in fear that their child may become the victim of racist violence.

While the imagery above is violent, revealing themes of physical and psychic enslavement, Alva's meditation ends in verses of exoneration and freedom: "*The rise and fall of nations I saw. And the voice called again Alva Alva, and I flew into a world of light,*

multitudes singing, Free, free, I am so glad" (47). These final lines are emancipatory and empowering, pointing toward freedom and happiness through metaphysical transcendence. By ending this section in Alva's voice, Olsen reclaims the space for the black voices within the text. Alva's viewpoint brings the section to a close, and thus, she has the "last word" in this section of the story.

Similarly to Part One, Part Two of "O Yes" also features multiple narrative perspectives. The second movement of the story again tells the story through several voices and perspectives—mostly female—creating a plurality of voices. The story's mode of narration varies between an omniscient narrator, Carol's point of view as well as Helen's. Like in the church, it is sometimes difficult to "untwine" all the voices. While the multiple voices at the church seem to function as a communal voice, Carol and Helen's home does not feature such a shared viewpoint. The multiplicity of voices in both sections shows that while people may be physically close to one another, the divide of the color line brings discord and uncertainty. Part Two seems to take place immediately following the service. The section opens in Helen's reflections about the obvious rift between Parialee and Carol. Helen is disheartened by the dissolution of the girl's friendship, but her older daughter, Jeannie, and Helen's husband, Len, claim that it is "natural" for Parialee and Carol to part ways as they begin to conform with adult social mores. Although Helen is saddened by the demise of the girls' relationship, Jeannie calls the process "sorting," and tells her mother it cannot be avoided due to the social norms of their community. Len and Jeannie criticize Helen for taking Carol to the church and belittle her for believing that Carol and Parialee will continue to be friends in high school. Len tells her that she and Alva "ought to have [their] heads examined," for taking Carol to the church (47). This conversation between Helen, her husband, and daughter Jeannie maps out many of the injustices of the color line. Jeannie, who attends the same high school that the girls will attend, has a detailed understanding of the context of the color line in the social and educational setting. She tells her mother to "grow up," and that "'Parialee's collecting something else now. Like her own crowd. Like jivetalk and rhythmandlblues. Like teachers who treat her like a dummy and white kids who treat her like dirt; boys who think she's really something" (53). Thus, Jeannie gives voice to another perspective regarding crossing the color line.

After this conversation, there is a time lapse in the story. A few months after the baptism, Carol becomes ill with mumps, and Parialee brings her homework from school. The exchanges between the two are once again awkward, and at the end of the story, Carol admits to her mother that she and Parry are no longer friends anymore. Carol explains that, "a lot of the teachers and kids don't like Parry when they don't even know what she's like. Just because" (54). Helen, however, proposes that there is hope for the friendship to continue, even though Carol has felt disconnected from Parry

since the service. The dissolution of the friendship once again highlights the strange ambiguities of the color line.

While Carol appears to be saddened by the loss of her friendship, she seems to be most affected by how the voices she heard during the service continue to resonate in her mind. The agonized shrieks reverberate within Carol's memory; she cannot forget the overpouring of emotion. Several months after the service, Carol, "choked and convulsive," asks, "Mother, why did they sing and scream like that? "I hear it all the time" (54). Now that Carol has heard the pain and agony of those in her friend's community, she does not seem to be able to drown it out. Edwards explains that "Olsen was uncompromising in her belief that we must make a world in which 'full humanhood' is possible, a world in which human dignity and the full development of people's capacities are cherished and nurtured. She was fierce in her insistence that people working together for social justice would make this world possible" (*xi*). Olsen's thoughtful placement of spacing and textual silences allows the readers, like Carol, to stop and really listen to the voices. Hearing and really listening to the marginalized voices like those shared in the church is but one step in moving toward the full humanhood the Olsen envisioned for everyone in the United States.

As the story draws to an end, Helen attempts to answer Carol's questions about the service. As a white woman, Helen can only presume to provide Carol with the answers she seeks. This section is also spaced oddly, with irregular line breaks that make the passage fragmented and disjointed:

> Emotion, Helen thought of explaining, a characteristic of the religion all oppressed peoples, yes your very own great-grandparents—thought saying. And discarded.
> *Aren't you now, haven't you had feelings in yourself so strong they had to come out some way?* ("what howls restrained by decorum")—thought of saying. And discarded.
> Repeat Alva: *hope … every word out of their own life. A place to let go. And church is home.* And discarded.
> *The special history of the Negro people— history?—just you try living what must be lived every day*—thought of saying. And discarded. (54)

Because of the non-standard line breaks and lack of punctuation marks, it appears that Helen only thinks the words rather than speaking them out loud to Carol. She does say to her daughter that she and Parialee, "may be friends again. As Alva and I are" (54). Helen gives voice to the possibility that a future United States may rest upon the values of social justice and mutual respect. Helen struggles, however to explain the present world to Carol; she also seems to lack the proper language for it as she has not experienced racism. In the very last lines of the story, however, Helen's reflection indicates that women of all races share a similar voicelesness. As the narrator explains, "her own need leapt and plunged for the place of strength that was not—where one could

scream or sorrow while all knew and accepted, and gloved and loving hands waited to support and understand" (55). In this final line, Olsen seems to indicate the voicelesness of women extends beyond race, although much of the story has pointed exclusively toward the pervasive limitations placed on black speech acts in American society.

Circling back to Pierre Macherey's hypothesis posed at the beginning of this essay, silence can and indeed does carry meaning, and within the short story "O Yes," Tillie Olsen uses textual silences – the very spacing between words and sections of text – to call attention to the relative voicelesness of marginalized people in America. There can be power in silence, but moving this idea even further, Olsen's story insinuates that there is also power in stopping to listen to those who are crying out to be heard. The story implies that listeners who are in a position of privilege must pause to listen to the vocalizations of those who are not often heard. Just as in the story, the plurality of voices present in American discourses must be "untwined" so all the expressions, voices, and dialects, especially those that are marginalized, are received and acknowledged.

Indeed, Olsen not only presents a myriad of voices within the space of "O Yes," but she also ingeniously employs the paratext, the very black and white of the page, its spaces and gaps, to highlight how the expressions of people of color in America are sequestered and separated from dominant modes of discourse. This innovative use of paratextual elements functions on multiple levels, for much of what has been theorized about the paratext applies to the very voices that Olsen develops. If the paratext assures the presence of a literary work in the world, then this paratextual story assures the presence of the multiple voices in America. The paratextual elements that Olsen employs are by definition, situated at once inside and outside of the frontier. Thus, the stylistic choices in the story underscore how black people like those who comprise the church congregation, as well as those like Carol and Parialee engaging in borderism, inhabit a liminal space, both inside and outside the American political system. Likewise, the story draws attention to the ambiguities present during the era of the color line through its use of challenging, ambiguous components of the text. In the end, the very blank spaces, pauses, ruptures and absences in the story that may be overlooked, just as the speech acts of people on the margins are overlooked, become a powerful a source of alternative presence highlighting the need to stop and listen to such voices.

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Abstract: Coined by French literary theorist Gérard Genette, the term "paratext" describes any number of elements that frame a work of literature, including indexes, illustrations, tables of contents, as well as typographical elements such as the spacing between words and textual margins. This essay begins by exploring how, historically, such paratextual spaces have served as sites for literary protest and subversion of racist and sexist ideologies, in order to bring focus to American author Tillie Olsen's innovative use of such elements in her short fiction. This essay specifically analyzes Olsen's use of paratextual spacing and typography in her short story "O Yes" (1961) to demonstrate how such formal elements serve as a mimetic reflection of the division between black and white people in the mid-century 20th century. In short, Olsen employs marginal aspects of the text to consider and reflect upon the marginalization of African-Americans during the time the story was published. Olsen's irregular and non-standard spacing between lines, words, and paragraphs reflects the gaps and separation between people living in America and displays the cacophony of voices present in such a divided landscape.
Keywords: African-Americans, Baptism, borderism, paratext, segregation, typography

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Liminality and Beyond: Conceptions of In-betweenness in American Culture and Literature

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NEGOTIATING CULTURAL HYBRIDITY THROUGH MARVEL'S KAMALA KHAN: READING THE SECRET SUPERHERO IDENTITY *MS. MARVEL* AS A THIRD SPACE*

Introduction

In February 2014 the first issue of a new *Ms. Marvel* comic book series was published and was met with both critical acclaim and commercial success, becoming a bestseller in the US and winning the Hugo Award for best graphic story in 2015. The protagonist of this new *Ms. Marvel* series is sixteen-year-old Muslim Pakistani American Kamala Khan who is a fanfiction writing enthusiastic admirer of the *Avengers* superhero team. The fact that Kamala's experiences are partially based on childhood memories and anecdotes of Pakistani American MARVEL editor Sana Amanat has been particularly positively received by the general public (Kumar, Okwodu). *Ms. Marvel* has also attracted scholarly attention which has so far mostly focused on the treatment of gendered identities in the novel (Gibbons, Khoja-Moolji and Niccolini) as well as its reception (Cox, Kent) – a tendency that is also visible in Jessica Baldanzi's and Hussein Rashid's interdisciplinary essay collection *Ms. Marvel's America: No Normal* (Baldanzi and Rashid). My reading of *Ms. Marvel* will build on existing criticism and employ Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of cultural hybridity, mimicry and Third Space in order to open up new interpretative dimensions for this American superhero comic.

In contrast to Dagbovie-Mullins and Berlatsky who relate Bhabha's idea of the Third Space to the ways in which certain spatial settings work within the comic (Dagbovie-Mullins and Berlatsky 71-72), I argue that it is the superhero persona of *Ms. Marvel* herself that functions as a Third Space. As such, it enables protagonist Kamala Khan to create a new identity incorporating and re-interpreting both elements derived from her Pakistani and from her American background illustrating "that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity [… and] can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew" (Bhabha 55). This engagement with hybridity on the content level is amplified by the combination of differently sourced iconographies

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on the level of imagery, as my analysis will show. Because of their focus on cultural exchange through the strategic and selective appropriation of meanings, the concepts of cultural hybridity and Third Space are uniquely suited to investigate liminal characters such as Kamala Khan who are marked by "in-between-ness" (in Kamala's case between her Pakistani American home and the mainstream Anglo-American public; between her personal religious beliefs, her imam's conservatism and an Islamophobic public or between her desire to be part of her "normal" peer group while simultaneously passionately engaging in nerd subculture). Reading Kamala's secret superhero identity as a Third Space allows me to discuss the empowering quality that the transformation into *Ms. Marvel* develops for the protagonist, which I identify as Kamala's ability to embrace ostensibly contradictory parts of her life and combine them to into armor, both in the literal and in the metaphorical sense. This armor is not only used to protect Kamala herself but is also turned into a positive force for societal transformation. My argumentation is based on a number of close readings that I have selected regarding their engagement with cultural hybridity in both imagery and written language.

The cover of the first collected paperback edition of the series depicts Kamala Khan in her *Ms. Marvel* fan shirt holding three books: two schoolbooks and a religious guidebook (see figure 1 in the appendix, Wilson et al. 2016a). The titles of the three books are "US History", "Hadith to live by" and "Illustration and Design." Taking contextual knowledge about the character into account, the books in her hand can be read as visualizing Kamala's status as a US citizen, as a Muslim (Hadith is a collection of sayings that are attributed to the Prophet Muhammed) and as a creator of artistic work. All three books are roughly the same size and positioned directly next to each other which I read as showing that all three parts of Kamala's identity (US citizen, Muslim and artist) are equally important to her. Thus, even before buying the first issue of *Ms. Marvel* the potential readers are given a hint about the themes that they can expect to be addressed in this comic book. Although only half of Kamala's face is visible, it is immediately clear that the protagonist is a person of color. The *Ms. Marvel* fan shirt identifies Kamala as a superhero comics fan and references the practice of wearing fan shirts to self-identify as a member of American nerd subculture (for more information on Muslims in nerd subculture, see Gittinger). The bracelet on her right wrist spells the name "Kamala" in Arabic script – while this detail might stay unnoticed by non-Arabic speaking readers, it could work as a purchase incentive for Arabic speaking buyers.

The issue itself starts with introducing Kamala to the readers by showing her in various social settings: with her friends, with her family at home and at school. Although her relationship with her parents is affectionate, Kamala often feels misunderstood by them and struggles to come to terms with their conservative set of values and ambitious expectations. The portrayal of Muslim parents as conservative entails the danger

of affirming negative, Islamophobic stereotypes. To counter this problem, the *Ms. Marvel* comics endeavor to disrupt such simplified, binary-affirming (liberal-Western vs. conservative-Oriental) characterizations by consciously playing with their readers' expectations. One example for this is Kamala's parents' strict prohibition on her attending parties where boys are present that is contrasted with their approval of Kamala's deep friendship with Italian American Bruno Carrelli who is male but trusted by Mr. and Mrs. Khan. Another example for the series' questioning of stereotypes is the introduction of Tyesha Hillman who later marries Kamala's brother Aamir. Tyesha is an African American convert to ultra-orthodox Islam and always wears an abaya and a hijab when she leaves her house. However, she is also a fan of science fiction literature – a hobby that she shares with protagonist Kamala – and she is working full-time as a legal assistant thereby providing for her and Aamir's family (Wilson et al. 2016b).

Growing up as a second-generation immigrant in the United States, Kamala often feels excluded by her mostly Anglo-American classmates. While she has a number of close friends such as Turkish American Nakia Bahadir or the afore mentioned Bruno Carrelli (who later becomes her superhero sidekick), Kamala strives to be more popular, but is also confronted with her classmates' xenophobic, racist and Islamophobic prejudices. After sneaking out to attend a party with her more popular classmates, Kamala's hopes of fitting in are disappointed when she is bullied by the other Anglo-American students. As Kamala leaves the party, a mysterious mist descends upon her equipping her with superhuman abilities and causing hallucinations.

Heroic visions

A splash page shows how Kamala sees her three favorite superheroes in a vision: Tony Stark in his *Iron Man* suit, Carol Danvers who was previously *Ms. Marvel* and now calls herself *Captain Marvel* and Steve Rogers in his *Captain America* costume (Wilson et al. 2016a, 15; see figure 2 in the appendix).[1] Their setup is reminiscent of motifs found in European Renaissance art. The figure *Captain Marvel* at the center of the image invites comparisons to the paintings *The Birth of Venus* and *Primavera* by Italian artist Sandro Botticelli as her posture resembles that of Venus in both pieces of art. Portraying Carol Danvers in the style of the ancient Roman goddess of love, lust and beauty can be read as a tongue-in-cheek comment on previous representations of the character as an object of sexual desire rather than as an independent complex superhero. Furthermore, *Primavera's* theme of the beginning of spring that is also taken up in the quoted poem on the page emphasizes the importance of Kamala's personal development of becom-

1 This article mentions a number of superheroes without going into detail concerning their background. For a concise introduction to the superheroes mentioned, see Duncan and Smith 2013.

ing more mature and taking responsibility for herself and her social environment. Additionally, the paintings *Sistine Madonna* and *The Assumption of the Virgin* by Italian artists Raphael Sanzio and Titian respectively can be read as another point of reference. Once again, it is the character of Carol Danvers that produces intertextuality as her facial expression and the blue and red colors of her costume connect her to the depiction of the Virgin Mary in both pieces of art. Taking the intertextual references between Carol Danvers and both Venus and the Virgin Mary into account, one can read these as a critique of traditions of representation that depict female characters as either sexually available Venus or as innocent Virgin Mary, but do not leave room for more complexity in their characterization.

In previous scholarship, the imagery of the splash page has been associated with the painting *Transfiguration* by Italian Renaissance artist Raphael Sanzio with Carol Danvers in the position that Jesus Christ takes in the original painting which Priego reads as endowing the scene with messianic undertones (cf. Priego n.p.). Complementing Priego's analysis, I regard this setup as consciously engaging (potentially subverting) readers' expectations about what a lifechanging revelation should look like in a playful way: this is implied by the insertion of the reference to *Transfiguration* which is often considered to be highbrow art into this medium of popular culture. The playfulness of the scene is further intensified by the depiction of seemingly random animals all over the panel, among others a winged sloth that is held by *Iron Man*, a number of seagulls one whom is donning a facemask that is commonly associated with *Wolverine* (thereby foreshadowing the character's cameo appearance in a subsequent issue) and a hedgehog that raises an oversized green *Hulk*-like hand to form the peace sign (*Wolverine* and *Hulk* are fictional characters appearing in MARVEL comics, for more information on their backgrounds see Duncan and Smith 2013). The sloth and the hedgehog are later revealed to be stuffed animals that Kamala owns referencing the fandom practice of collecting merchandise connected to one's favorite franchises.

The iconography inspired by both European art history and American superhero comics is expanded by the inclusion of a passage from a poem by South Asian Sufi poet Amir Khusro (1253-1325 CE) – which, however, remains uncredited (Priego n.p.). Usually the language of Urdu (the original language of the poem and native language of Kamala) is written using the Perso-Arabic alphabet; I consider the use of Latin script here as a concession to the anglophone North American target audience of the comic. The readers' attention is immediately drawn to the original (Urdu) text of the poem that is spoken by Carol Danvers: the words are set in a different font and exceed the boundaries of her speech balloon. The text is translated into English by *Iron Man* and *Captain America*, albeit in a much smaller font size and using the same font that the comic book employs for Kamala's own direct speech. The poem that deals with

the coming of spring can be connected to Kamala's coming-of-age story: "the yellow mustard is blooming, the Mango buds click open" metaphorically refers to Kamala's awakening of her superhuman abilities that have lain dormant inside of her since birth. Seeing three prototypical American superheroes recite an ancient South Asian poem illustrates how Kamala's worldview is shaped by a variety of influences. The inclusion of Carol Danvers, Steve Rogers and Tony Stark specifically can be read as representative of different periods[2] of American comic book history: I read Steve Rogers' *Captain America* as standing for what is commonly referred to as the Golden Age of comics since he was introduced in March 1941 as a patriotic conscientious supersoldier who fights against the Axis powers in World War II. Following this line of thought, Tony Stark's *Iron Man* (first introduced in 1963) stands for the Silver Age of comics as demonstrated by his engineering ingenuity combined with personal flaws. Carol Danvers then embodies the post-Silver Age era in which the medium gradually turned towards the exploration of social issues and explicitly engaged with questions of female empowerment through the increased creation of superheroines. The three superheroes seem to invite Kamala to rank herself among them. The inclusion of *Iron Man* and *Captain America* in particular can be read as emblematic for Kamala's relation to the United States as a nation with the two superheroes embodying two different views on Kamala's home country. Steve Rogers alias *Captain America* has stood for patriotism, integrity and conscientiousness ever since his creation, whereas Tony Stark alias *Iron Man* is usually depicted as a wealthy scientist who is willing to use questionable means to achieve his ambitious goals (Brownie and Graydon 56; 145). I read Kamala as attracted to the ideals that *Captain America* represents while simultaneously being aware of the threats that corporate capitalism (here personified by *Iron Man*) poses to these ideals.

The positioning of iconographies, symbols and textual fragments from different sources alongside each other on this splash page can be read as an example of cultural difference. Bhabha develops this concept in contrast to cultural diversity as the acknowledgement of cultural differences without relying on fixed representations instead affirming the idea that meanings are in flux thereby avoiding the perpetuation of established hierarchies (Bhabha 50-51). This idea of cultural difference is reflected in both the imagery that combines motifs derived from European art history, South Asian literary history and US comic book iconography (as I have shown using Kamala's vision as an example) and in the characterization of Kamala, as the scene in which her superpowers are revealed to her emerges as a foreshadowing of Kamala's later personal development that leads her from perceiving her own difference primarily as a burden to realizing that it can also be an asset: as soon as Kamala learns to balance the different

2 My use of the periods of American comic books is based on Klock 2002.

aspects of her identity, they will create a coherent harmonious overall picture just like the different elements on this splash page.

First transformation

When Kamala is told that she has received shapeshifting abilities, she immediately decides to imitate her favorite superhero, *Ms. Marvel*. Changing her hair, skin and eye color as well as her body type, Kamala transforms into a white blonde woman who conforms to Western conventional ideals of beauty. What might at first simply look like a symptom of Kamala's internalized sexism, can acquire additional potential meanings when read through Bhabha's concept of mimicry, used here in the sense of a "copying of the colonizing culture, behaviour, manners and values by the colonized [which] contains both mockery and a certain 'menace', [… because it] reveals the limitation in the authority of colonial discourse" (Ashcroft et al. 125). As mimicry is created by the partial adoption of a dominant group's cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, it will be interesting to see which parts of Carol Danvers' *Ms. Marvel* Kamala adopts (Bhabha 122-123). While Kamala's *Ms. Marvel* looks similar to Carol's version, there are noticeable differences in their physical appearances: whereas Carol has often been drawn with disproportionally large breasts and long legs (as that was a common way of portraying female characters in superhero comic books throughout the 1970s to 1990s according to Duncan and Smith 2009: 257), Kamala's *Ms. Marvel* features more realistic proportions. Thus, Kamala's becoming of *Ms. Marvel* "that is almost the same, but not quite" the same as Carol Danvers' *Ms. Marvel* can be considered as a critique of sexist traditions of female representation in American superhero comics (Bhabha 122).

Kamala's transformation is depicted as ambiguous: at first, she feels empowered by her ability to look like her favorite superhero, but simultaneously Kamala also realizes that *Ms. Marvel*'s late 1970s costume (and her unrealistically drawn bodily proportions) would today be considered "politically incorrect" as she states in a conversation with her vision of Carol Danvers (Wilson et al. 2016a, 17). This consciousness prevents Kamala's chosen style from being merely read as internalized sexism and adds an element of mockery to it. By criticizing stereotypical representations of female superheroes as overtly sexy and catering to the male gaze, Kamala's transformation illustrates that "mimicry is never very far from mockery, since it can appear to parody whatever it mimics" (Ashcroft et al. 125). As such, Kamala's mimicry can be read as a strategy of resistance against those sexist stereotypes.

However, soon Kamala starts to feel uncomfortable copying Carol Danvers' look as she perceives her revealing costume as impractical and not consistent with her personality: captions tell the reader that Kamala realizes that "being someone else

isn't liberating" and she feels so exposed in Carol's superhero outfit that she prefers borrowing a pullover from a homeless man to walking the streets dressed in nothing but Carol's costume (Wilson et al. 2016a, 34-35). Kamala also learns that her capacity for accelerated healing only works when she looks like herself. Reading Kamala's first transformation as mimicry thus visualizes both the potential of practices of mimicry for resistance, but also shows its limitations for the personal empowerment of those performing it. While Kamala's imitation of Carol Danvers' style at first succeeds in increasing Kamala's confidence thereby enabling her to perform heroic acts, it also harms Kamala by blocking her healing factor and makes her aware of her own stereotypical ideas about what a female superhero should look like. This becomes apparent when Kamala explains to her friend Bruno how she feels pressured to look like a conventionally beautiful white woman in order to be perceived as a superhero: "[E]verybody's expecting **Ms. Marvel**. A **real** superhero. With perfect hair and big boots. Not Kamala Khan from New Jersey" (Wilson et al. 2016a, 32). Bruno thereupon encourages her to create her own superhero identity.

Creating an own Superhero Identity

With Bruno's help, Kamala designs her own costume (for a picture of the new costume, see figure 3 in the appendix). Just like the original *Ms. Marvel* outfit, Kamala's new costume has a bathing suit as a basis – however, while Carol Danvers wore a sleeve- and legless one-piece swimsuit, Kamala modifies her old burkini (for more information on the history and reception of the burkini, see Akou). As she removes the hood that normally covers the wearer's head, this item of clothing is not recognizable as such anymore – thereby sidestepping the potential pitfalls that this controversial garment could entail – and the resulting costume is more reminiscent of a shalwar kameez (a traditional outfit worn throughout the Indian subcontinent) with its long shirt that covers the top of her trousers. On its front, the costume prominently features a stylized yellow lightning bolt, the symbol of superhero *Ms. Marvel*. Kamala also wears a red dupatta that does not cover her head though, but instead flows behind her like a superhero cape. Brownie and Graydon explain the implications that the cape in superhero comics may have: first, the image of "the flowing red cape" can create "the illusion of motion" giving the superhero a more dynamic look (Brownie and Graydon 16). Second, they take the history of the cape as "military garb" into account: using the example of ancient Roman emperor Julius Caesar, they outline how "Julius Caesar wore a crimson cape into battle [… which] transformed Caesar's actions in combat into a propaganda performance" (ibid.). Brownie and Graydon transfer this to *Superman* with his red cape "positioning him as a majestic general who aims to inspire others to

act according to the same set of moral principles" (ibid.). I suggest that as a comics fan Kamala is aware of the implications that wearing a red cape entails for a superhero and deliberately chooses to wear her dupatta like a cape in order to include herself in this tradition while simultaneously proudly displaying her South Asian family background.

The costume's color scheme takes up the blue-red-yellow combination of *Captain Marvel*'s outfit and is based on the classic bright primary color arrangement for American superheroes in general dating back to the creation of *Superman* in 1938 (Brownie and Graydon 16). The red and blue of the costume also evokes the colors of the US flag which serves to remind the readers of Kamala's status as a US citizen and can be read as an expression of her self-identification with the United States as a nation. Kamala's mask is a nod to classic American superhero outfits. Brownie and Graydon explain that the mask of a superhero serves three functions: "It transforms the wearer from ordinary civilian to superhero, disguising him in order to protect the identity of his alter ego, and those he cares about" (Brownie and Graydon 28). This is also true for Kamala who keeps her superhero identity secret from her family and most of her friends in order to protect them. Kamala's golden bracelet is a family heirloom that is transformed into protective gear by her friend Bruno, who persuades Kamala's mother to trust him with the valuable bracelet that has been in the family for generations and has travelled with Kamala's great-grandmother Aisha from Mumbai (then still called Bombay) to Karachi during the Partition of India and from Karachi to Jersey City with Kamala's mother Muneeba Khan. Bruno tells Muneeba: "[T]he first time I saw Kamala wearing these, they were so big on her that it was like she was wearing armor. Like they were protecting her. That's what I want to make for her. Armor…" (Wilson et al. 2016c, 82).

Thus, Kamala's costume unites traditional American superhero comic iconography with specific elements derived from her Pakistani American background thereby expressing pride of her family's cultural heritage. The motif of taking ownership of otherness through a superhero costume is a recurring theme in American comic books, as Brownie and Graydon outline (Brownie and Graydon 18). They use *Superman* as an example for this practice who "display[s] his Kryptonian heritage" through the crest on the chest of his costume (which is the family crest of the House of El and also the Kryptonian symbol for "hope") thereby "promot[ing] his alien identity" (ibid.). However, Brownie and Graydon also acknowledge that superhero "[c]haracters cannot appear too 'Other' as their strangeness would render their meaning inaccessible. In order to successfully communicate a set of values, the costume must be reassuringly familiar" (Brownie and Graydon 25). By combining elements of Muslim (burkini) and South Asian (shalwar kameez and dupatta) clothing with classic American superhero

iconography (cape, mask, color scheme), Kamala's costume manages to balance familiarity with Otherness.

In contrast to Kamala's first transformation into a Carol Danvers-lookalike, her new costume can be read as a counter-narrative to "classic" American superhero comics and as a critique of its canon which can be perceived to rely on representations of female superheroes as merely visual treats for a primarily male heterosexual audience. By selectively appropriating elements from diverse sources, Kamala turns the making of her costume into a space of negotiation, an ambivalent space in which social identities and ideologies are questioned and negotiated akin to Homi K. Bhabha's "Third Space of enunciation" (Bhabha 54) – a "space in which cultural meanings and identities always contain the traces of other meanings and identities" (Ashcroft et al. 53-54). The result of these negotiations is Kamala's new costume which I argue exemplifies that Third Space encounters can create something new and substantially different than just conglomerates of new and old elements (Bhabha 56).

The readers witness the emergence of Kamala's *Ms. Marvel* as a new cultural form. In Kamala's new secret superhero identity, her liminal position that she had previously perceived as a burden, works to her advantage. I read Kamala's superpowers of supreme flexibility and adaptability (she can change the size and shape of body parts or her whole body) as a positive reinterpretation of and resistance against her personal experiences of socially enforced conformity. While Kamala's accelerated healing factor keeps her safe physically, it could also be considered as a metaphor for her acquired resilience. Her newly found mission to protect her hometown imbues her with a sense of purpose that boosts her confidence. Kamala's superhero identity is not only inspired by her role model Carol Danvers, but also rooted in her religious orientation. Although Kamala is skeptical towards the conservative imam of her mosque whose warnings against the dangers of premarital sex and whose insistence upon gender separation inside the mosque appear outdated to her, she regards her quest for protecting Jersey City as rooted in her personal religious beliefs. The captions that inform the readers about Kamala's thoughts immediately before her first rescue mission make clear how Kamala's religious orientation influences her self-perception as a superhero:

> "There's this ayah from the **Quran** that my dad always quotes when he sees something **bad** on TV. A fire or a flood or a bombing. 'Whoever kills one person, it is as if he has killed all mankind—and whoever **saves** one person, it is as if he has **saved all of mankind**" (Wilson et al. 2016a, 28).

Kamala is willing to help even those people who have previously bullied her, as evidenced by her first heroic act: she saves Zoe Zimmer, the girl who made fun of her at the party. Zoe had drunk too much alcohol at the party and fell into a lake where Kamala as *Ms. Marvel* saves her from drowning by lifting her up with an embiggened hand. While

Kamala is willing to employ her oversized fists to fight, she solves conflicts just as often by talking to people in a compassionate way. This portrayal contradicts stereotypes of Muslim people in North American comic books as irrationally angry and as threats to a Western way of life that used to be prevalent in the previous decades and are only slowly abandoned in present-day products (Gibbons 450; for more information on the representation of Muslims in US comics, see Stroemberg).

Conclusion

I conclude that employing Bhabha's concepts of cultural hybridity and Third Space can help us to understand how Kamala Khan's "in-between-ness" (between her Pakistani American home and the mainstream Anglo-American public; between her personal religious beliefs, her imam's conservatism and an Islamophobic public…) becomes a source of empowerment when she transforms into *Ms. Marvel*. Whereas adapting her behavior to various surroundings such as school or family gatherings is perceived as a necessary nuisance by Kamala, it also trains her ability to quickly assess situations and react accordingly which makes her even more effective as superhero *Ms. Marvel*. When creating her own superhero costume, Kamala combines elements derived from US superhero comics iconography and her Pakistani family background. She strategically and selectively appropriates the meaning of some symbols while she re-interprets the meaning of others, as my analysis of her dupatta has shown which is simultaneously a reference to classic red superhero capes and a way of integrating a traditional South Asian garment into her costume. Kamala's bracelet that as an heirloom symbolizes her emotional connection to her family is turned into armor that protects *Ms. Marvel* from enemy attacks thus turning her family from a source of generation conflict into a supportive part of her identity. Although her Anglo-American classmates are prejudiced against Kamala because of her Muslim faith, it becomes the moral basis of her superhero identity which in turn leads to Kamala saving the lives of exactly those Islamophobic people (among others).

Kamala's choice to create a new *Ms. Marvel* persona as a superhero of color instead of imitating her Anglo-American idol Carol Danvers can be read as a step towards her overcoming internalized sexism and internalized racism: finally she is able to think beyond stereotypes of female superheroes and can picture herself in a role that previously seemed reserved for white women who conform to Western conventional standards of beauty. However, as Kamala's *Ms. Marvel* persona never explicitly professes her faith and does not seem to be perceived as person of color and/or Muslim by the general public within the comic, one might consider her superhero identity as overshadowing her other identities. While *Ms. Marvel* does not appear to be able to

influence attitudes towards Muslim and/or Pakistani American women on the diegetic level of the graphic novel, the commercial success of the comic series points at her effectiveness on the extradiegetic level: celebrated as a "victory for the misfits of the world" (Priego) and created to encompass both a "very specific minority experience" (Kumar) and the universal coming-of-age struggles of contemporary teenagers, *Ms. Marvel* has been turned into a "real-world protest icon" by fans using her imagery to protest mainly Islamophobic socio-political developments (see Romano for concrete examples).

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Wilson, G. Willow, writer. *Ms Marvel Omnibus*. Art by Adrian Alphona, Jacob Wyatt, Elmo Bandoc and Takeshi Miyazawa. Color art by Ian Herring and Irma Knivila. Letters by Joe Caramagna. New York: MARVEL, 2016.

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Abstract: In October 2014 the first issue of a new *Ms. Marvel* comic book series starring Muslim Pakistani American teenager Kamala Khan was published and was met with both critical acclaim and commercial success. In the ongoing series, Muslim Pakistani American teenager Kamala Khan struggles to come to terms with the expectations of her Pakistani parents and her desire to fit into mainstream American society. After mysteriously acquiring shapeshifting abilities, Kamala steps into the superhero role of *Ms. Marvel* which serves – as I argue – as a Third Space that enables Kamala to create a new identity incorporating and re-interpreting both elements derived from her Pakistani and from her US background illustrating "that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity [... and] can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew" (Bhabha 2004, 55). Under the guise of *Ms. Marvel*, Kamala protects the inhabitants of her hometown Jersey City, NJ, from gentrification, cyberbullying or the exploitation of vulnerable teenagers, among others. I suggest that Kamala's costume, her superpowers of flexibility and adaptability and her attitude towards her role as a superhero reflect Homi K. Bhabha's conception of hybridity as an empowering condition and I propose that Kamala's adoption of the *Ms. Marvel* identity transcends mere mimicry. At the center of my analysis is the liminal character of Kamala Khan as a nerdy female Muslim teenager of color living in the US that resists easy categorization: she is a fanfiction writing enthusiastic admirer of the *Avengers* superhero team and bonds with her brother's (also Muslim) girlfriend over Frank Herbert's sci-fi classic *Dune*; she takes a skeptical view towards the conservative imam of her mosque, but she is also a devout Muslim with a life philosophy rooted in her religion; she is willing to risk her life to help even those of her peers who have previously bullied her in xenophobic ways. Relating Kamala's secret superhero identity to Bhabha's concept of Third Space allows me to discuss the empowering quality that the transformation into *Ms. Marvel* develops for the protagonist, which I identify as Kamala's ability to embrace ostensibly contradictory parts of her life and combine them into armour, both in the literal and in the metaphorical sense. In this chapter, I will offer an interpretation of the character of Kamala Khan and her secret *Ms. Marvel* identity as a Third Space examining in how far Homi K. Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity can open up new interpretative dimensions for this American superhero comic.

Keywords: hybridity, identity politics, postcolonial theory, superhero comics, Third Space

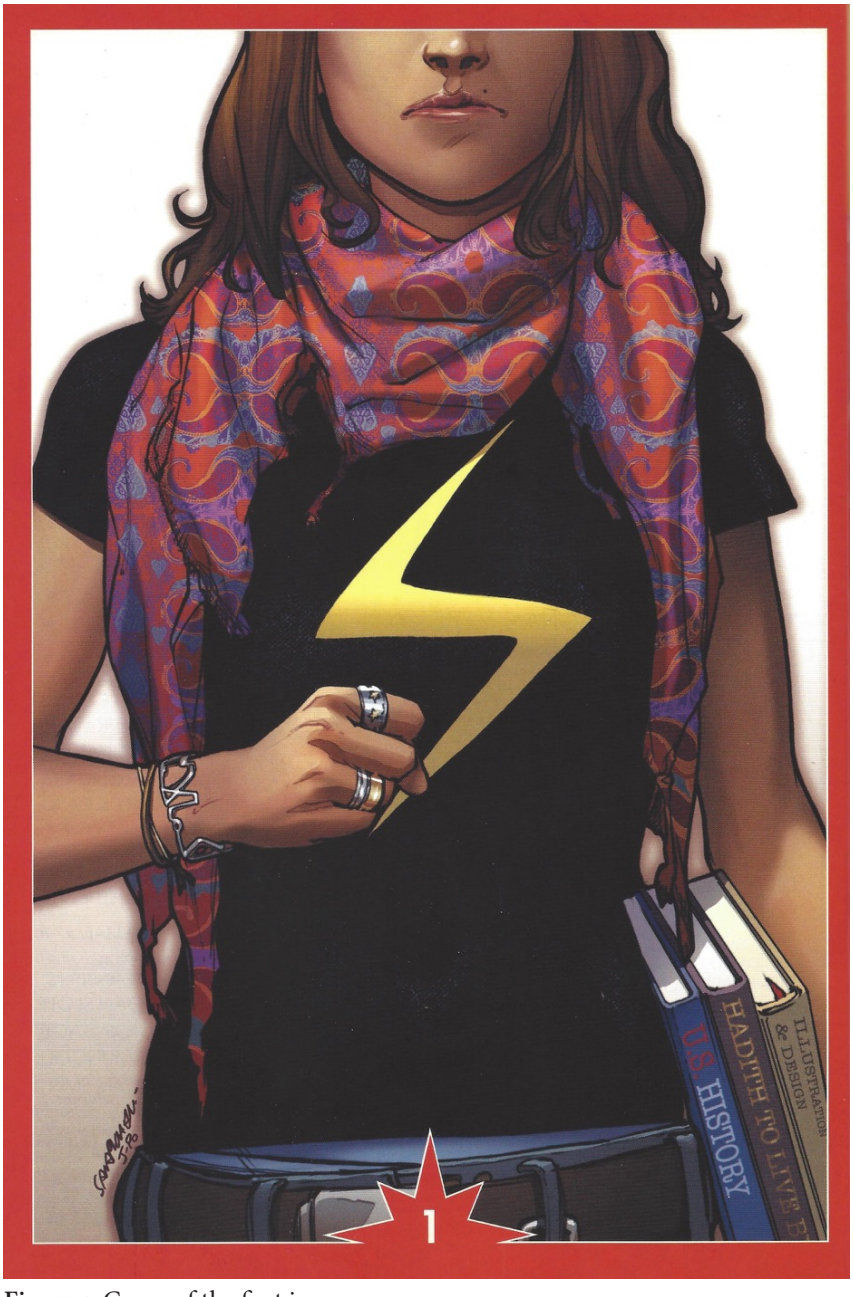

Figure 1: Cover of the first issue
Wilson, G. Willow, writer. Ms Marvel Omnibus. Art by Adrian Alphona, Jacob Wyatt, Elmo Bandoc and Takeshi Miyazawa. Color art by Ian Herring and Irma Knivila. Letters by Joe Caramagna. New York: MARVEL, 2016. Title page.

Figure 2: Kamala's vision

Wilson, G. Willow, writer. Ms Marvel Omnibus. Art by Adrian Alphona, Jacob Wyatt, Elmo Bandoc and Takeshi Miyazawa. Color art by Ian Herring and Irma Knivila. Letters by Joe Caramagna. New York: MARVEL, 2016. p. 15

Figure 3: Kamala's costume

Wilson, G. Willow, writer. Ms Marvel Omnibus. Art by Adrian Alphona, Jacob Wyatt, Elmo Bandoc and Takeshi Miyazawa. Color art by Ian Herring and Irma Knivila. Letters by Joe Caramagna. New York: MARVEL, 2016. Appendix.

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Liminality and Beyond: Conceptions of In-betweenness in American Culture and Literature

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THE SOUTH, SLAVERY, AND THE BLACK FOLK'S SOUL-CRUSHING IN *MY FATHER'S NAME* BY LAWRENCE P. JACKSON

Introduction

American slavery is the most despicable institution experienced by Africans because of its excesses. The first African slaves arrived in Virginia in 1619. Indeed, deported to the Americas, Africans were the beast of burden of a system of dehumanization that reduced them to simple objects. The discovery and the exploitation of the American continent in the fifteenth century were at the origin of the slave trade. In fact, European settlers created plantations and mines on the American continent in general, but specifically in the South of the United States which includes Virginia. They needed more labor than the Indians weakened by several years of colonial war with the same Europeans. The option of black slaves was thus a response to their concern not only to get a robust and resilient workforce within their reach but also to have to manage a population accustomed to a climate similar to the American climate. In this context, the South became a place that combined the materiality, the meaning, and the practice of slavery. In other words, the South was a place combining the location and locale of the physical and cultural alienation of the black folk. In such circumstances of soul-crushing, feelings and emotions shared by Blacks were essentially related to their slave status. Thus, this paper critically examines Lawrence P. Jackson's perspective of recalling the horror of slavery and Blacks' struggle for freedom in the Postbellum South in *My Father's Name* (2012). In fact, as Jackson reconstructs sequences of Edward Jackson and Granville Hundley's lives, respectively his father's grandfather and great-grandfather, two black men who experienced slavery and Reconstruction, we will first show that American slavery was a racialized slavery based on the concept of Otherness, chiefly originated from the use of the notions of "being white" and "better" to establish differences between the white and the black races. Second, through Karl Marx's historical materialism, we will highlight how under capitalism the inhumane process of acquiring slaves came to resemble that of acquiring raw materials because Africans were dehumanized and commoditized. At last, we will evoke the cultural alienation of the black folk by presenting

the South as a nebulous which made it difficult for African descendants to construct their own identity.

A racialized American slavery originated from the concept of Otherness

American slavery is a racialized slavery in which Africans were unwillingly brought to American colonies by white colonists. Indeed, American slavery, known as the chattel slavery, is an institution in which Africans only were enslaved. Thus, in *My Father's Name* Lawrence P. Jackson traces back the genealogy of his family, a black family, which has experienced slavery like every African American family. These enslaved people were "transplanted West Africans, people such as the Wolof and the Mandingo," (49) and Central Africans from Congo and Angola (105). To show the generic feature of black Africans' enslavement, Jackson says: "I guess it isn't really unique that my grandfather's father, not exactly a distant ancestor to me, was born enslaved" (44). The racialization of American slavery is grounded on various contrasts between Blacks and Whites. Africans were mainly dark skinned people, they had different cultures and beliefs, and had a world vision different from that of the white colonists. These evident contrasts have sufficed to conceptualize a structural inequality between Blacks and Whites. Accordingly, the development of this race-based slavery sharpens our comprehension of the ideological racial construction of black bestiality and inferiority which has impaired African Americans' life for centuries. The ideological difference between Blacks and Whites originated from the concept of Otherness. In the Foreword of *The Origin of Others* by Toni Morrison, Ta-Nehisi Coates states that to live as an Other is to exist beyond the border of a great belonging (Morrison, 2017, XV). Thus, to be an Other is to be identified as an outsider, a stranger or an alien in order to define one self. And Lajos Brons defines othering in these terms:

> Othering is the simultaneous construction of the self or in-group and the other or out-group in mutual and unequal opposition through identification of some desirable characteristic that the self/in-group has and the other/out-group lacks and/or some undesirable characteristic that the other/out-group has and the self/in-group lacks. Othering thus sets up a superior self/in-group in contrast to an inferior other/out-group, but this superiority/inferiority is nearly always left implicit. (70)

Othering expresses the attitude or the action of treating the other as different. Thus, it represents the practices of the dominant group to which everyone who does not conform is modelled as an Other. As to Otherness, it denotes the state of being different. Othering is associated with an invented perception of difference. The inherent difference between Blacks and Whites is simply biological: the skin color. The black skin color is the category employed to justify Blacks' inferiority, and it is on the basis

of that biological difference that Whites, the dominant in-group, have constructed the dominated out-group of slaves. In this respect, Blacks are the victims of the white civilization which admits that blackness equals sin, ugliness and immorality. Blacks' identity is built up and forced upon them by the white power structure. As such, they appear as cultural subjects whose history, memory and authentic values are denied.

Otherness and othering make clear the issues of racialization as an ideological process and the uniqueness of the origin or the monogenesis of the human species. All human beings belong to the human race. On the one hand, it is indicated that Africa is the birth place of the human species, and on the other hand, one African woman is known to be the common ancestor of all humans (black, white, yellow, mixed-race, etc.). In this case, race derives from a folk idea. And the ideology about human differences is a social construction, but it does not result from a scientific process. "Race is a concept devised by one group of people to provide advantages and privileges to themselves at the expense of others" (Turner-Sadler 7).

To be an Other in America matters and the above definitions of Othering and Otherness highlight the opposition between Whites (the Self) and African Americans (the Other) in American society. One of the outcomes of the construction of the African as an Other is the concepts of "Being White" and "Better" instituted by white colonists who viewed race-based slavery as a normal abnormality. This led to stereotyping Blacks by sustaining for instance that "Whites belong to a higher species"; (189) "black Americans were really animals disguised as men" (207). "[...] Africans had been savages in need of some element of European enlightenment to become human beings ... (213) So to speak, they are suitable to enslavement. So, between 1700 and 1775, Virginia imported roughly 75,000 Africans and enslaved them" (103).

The stereotypes developed are the barriers erected between Blacks and Whites and prevented them from any harmonious cohabitation. As racial stereotypes are presented as truthful facts, Whites did not feel any remorse vis-à-vis Blacks' enslavement. Owing to the darkness of their skin, Africans were subjected to one of the cruelest forms of servitude ever known.

Chattel slavery did not exist in the early moment of the British colonies of America but the colonists made use of it in the seventeenth century. The option of black slaves was a response to white settlers' concern not only to get a robust and resilient workforce within their reach, but also to have to manage a population accustomed to a climate similar to American climate in their imperial expansion. In fact, the attempt to enslave Native Americans failed. That failure of enslaving Native Americans can be explained by the fact that "frequently, the Native Americans, who were not accustomed to forced labor, either became ill and died or simply ran away" (Turner-Sadler 32). In addition, enslaved Europeans, those who broke the law, or who were debtors, could not sup-

port harsh labor conditions, the heat, and the tropical diseases, and felt sick and died. Another reason is the fact that black Africans were accustomed to the climate and the heat of the south of the United States, and were resistant to tropical diseases and to the harsh conditions on plantations.

The so-called physical inferiority was associated with the psychological inferiority of Africans. The black skin color, the external sign, a signifier of fatality, is paired with the internal inferiority which entails the cultural traits and mental inability or ability of slaves. The interconnection of external and internal characteristics was established just to strengthen the ideological superiority of Whites. Sustaining that chattel slavery was a divine fact and consecrated by God, American enslavers made recurrent references to the biblical passages on the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt and the curse of "Blacks".[1] For example, Jackson informs the reader that "the colonists had mythic New World dreams of extraordinary fecundity and the end of restraint. Educated and propertied white men saw themselves as biblical patriarchs and Roman gods, and they acted with that sense of cosmic entitlement (and paranoia) from a young age" (56). That is the reason why it was difficult for Southerners to get rid of slavery.

In *My Father's Name*, behind the genealogy of his family that he traces back, Lawrence Jackson recounts the history of slavery in a chronological way. He starts from the beginning to the end and finishes by adding the history of the life of the ex-slaves in the post-bellum south. Indeed, American Slavery began when the first African slaves were brought to the North American colony of Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619. After centuries of enslavement, the Emancipation Proclamation issued on January 1, 1863, during the American Civil War (1861–1865). The thirteenth Amendment of American constitution gave a legal content to it. But, As the Freedmen's Bureau was underfunded and understaffed, it failed to help ex-slaves by supplying them social facilities. Southern Blacks were subjected to violence from white supremacists, including terrorist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan. On the whole, they wanted to re-enslave Blacks. "Perhaps, one kind of slavery ended only for a new but similarly strict order to take its place" (76). Racial segregation, another form of slavery, replaced slavery itself.

To finish, American chattel slavery was a racialized slavery which was grounded on the concept of Otherness. American colonists succeeded in creating an ideological difference between Blacks and Whites, which served to justify the enslavement of their fellow human beings. The only sin Africans committed is to have been born

1 To give a moral legitimacy to slavery, southerners referred to the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt to sustain the Peculiar Institution because for them, if slavery existed in the Bible, it was a divine fact. Indeed, according to the Old Testament, the Israelites had been in Egypt for generations, and as they had become so numerous, Pharaoh feared their presence and he enslaved them. In addition, the story of the so-called "Curse of Ham" in the Bible, Genesis 9, was interpreted and used as a biblical justification of the slave system.

black. Thus, nothing could justify the Peculiar Institution because human beings are biologically identical and the monogenesis implies the uniqueness of the human species. Unfortunately, the skin colors were regarded as signifiers of the categorization of humans. Then, Being white meant to be better, and being black meant to belong to sub-humanity or to a commoditized being.

African slaves, commoditized laborers in the South

In his historical materialism, Marx distinguishes five main types of relations of production: primitive communal, slave, feudal, capitalist and socialist. In the slave system, the relations of production is essentially featured by the fact that the slave-owner owns the means of production, he also owns the worker in production, the slave, whom he can sell, purchase, or kill as though he were an animal (Stalin 29). That is to say, American slavery was an institution in which the enslaved Africans were regarded as items of property, like houses or oxen, and had no rights as human beings. As well, they were commoditized beings who were regarded as simple objects that had mercantile values and were distinguishable from other goods in terms of their attributes or their uniqueness. American slavery was centered in the South of the United States of America and became the main feature of its economy formation.

The Antebellum South was a rural area whose economy was based on agriculture. In fact, European settlers created cotton fields, sugar cane plantations, and mines on the American continent in general, and in the South of the United States in particular. In this regard, the option of black slaves thus responded to the concern of Europeans to have more labor. Therefore, The South was a place which combined the location and the locale of the physical, mental, psychological, and cultural alienation of the black folk. According to T. Cresswell,

> Location refers to an absolute point in space with a specific set of coordinates and measurable distances from other locations. Location refers to the 'where' of place. Locale refers to the material setting for social relations – the way a place looks. Locale includes the buildings, streets, parks, and other visible and tangible aspects of a place. Sense of place refers to the more nebulous meanings associated with a place: the feelings and emotions a place evokes. These meanings can be individual and based on personal biography or they can be shared. (1)

On the one hand, as a location, the South of the United States comprised the Chesapeake colonies of Virginia and Maryland, the colonies of Georgia, and the Carolinas during the Revolutionary War. On the other hand, the South was the locale, the place which refers to the material setting of the relationship between Whites and Blacks, white enslavers and enslaved Blacks, and regulated with the Slave Codes[2]. On

2 The Slave Codes are any of several laws that regulated slavery.

the whole, it is viewed as a nebulous but a place which combined the materiality, the meaning, and the practice of slavery both as a system and a way of life. It had its distinctive features shared by Virginia.

In American history, the particularity of Virginia lies in the fact that the Virginia Company, a joint-stock enterprise chattered by King James I of Britain**,** planted the first permanent colonies in Jamestown, Virginia in 1606. And the first black Africans were brought to Virginia in 1619, just twelve years after the founding of Jamestown. Virginia is made up of Richmond, Pittsylvania County, Danville, Virginia Midland, Blue Ridge Mountains, the Piedmont, etc. In *My Father's Name*, Lawrence Jackson evokes Pittsylvania, Virginia as the place where his great-grandparents were enslaved. Virginia was a world in which death and despair were great parts of black Virginians' lives. "For the 189 planters in Pittsylvania, people who concentrated wealth in their hands and owned twenty or more African Americans, the night life of the enslaved was another kind of gold mine, a crop beyond the tobacco field" (54).

Through the last quotation Lawrence Jackson insists on the construction of black bestiality and the way owning slaves remarkably became a synonym of being wealthy. To be clear, the Old South differed from the other sections of the country in its high proportion of native-born Americans, both whites and blacks. The white society consisted of three white social classes. Respectively, there were the rich or the planters. And to be called a planter, one had to own twenty slaves and every 1/30 whites was a planter in 1860 (Shi and Tindall 477). In the middle class are small farmers and overseers on large plantations. And poor Whites were those whose wealth was cattle and pigs; they spent their time fishing, hunting and drinking whiskey. So to speak, the real engine behind the Peculiar Institution was economics. This idea is supported by Karl Marx's historical materialism which sustains:

> Under capitalism, the inhumane process of acquiring slaves came to resemble that of acquiring raw materials and livestock as free people were dehumanized and commoditized. The slave status became immutable and marked by birth. Like a commodity market, "the slave market itself maintains a constant supply of its labor-power. (Lee 2)

For Marx, American economy was "a commodity-producing economy, depending on trade with industrial capitalist economies which overwhelmed it; and the slaves were acquired for cash from the slave-traders who played so big a part in the primitive accumulation of capital" (Cornforth 50).

Accordingly, slaves were bought like simple animals and were transmuted by the perverted canons of mercantile capitalism into property. Slaves' death was a loss of capital by their owners because slaves were regarded as a capital which generated profit. Therefore, slave labor was given a new meaning as planters bought slaves less for their social status, but more as a commodity-producing labor. In this sense, slave labor was

transformed into a value-producing labor and slaves were given mercantile values like simple goods and were advertised on the market. That is the reason why it is revealed in *My Father's Name* that slavery itself was placed at the center of the taxonomic logic of the American government in the nineteenth century. All these things considered, American slavery was a fundamental aspect of rising capitalism.

Besides, the acquisition of slaves resulted in the infamous Triangular Trade that occurred between Europe, Africa, and the Americas. During that trade, Africans were transported in inhuman conditions. And the widespread development of large-scale farming in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries involved owning more slaves, and the number of black people would expand. "By 1840 Pittsylvania County contained the thousand mostly African-descended people" (47). This was related to the industrial revolution which implies the change in social and economic organization resulting from the replacement of hand tools by machine and power tools and the development of factories and large-scale industrial production.

In the United States of America, the industrial revolution prompted an emergence of a market economy. Especially, textile production was mechanized and with the invention of the Cotton Gin in 1793 by Eli Whitney, cotton became a "king." It emerged as quite a money-maker for the Southern states. Together, king cotton, sugar cane, and tobacco favored a tremendous expansion of the national economy and a driving force behind the expansion of slavery in the South. Slavery was as much the corn-stone of the bourgeois industry. Without slavery, there were no cotton, no tobacco, and no sugar cane; without cotton, tobacco, and sugar cane, there was no modern industry. Then, it is no longer surprising when Lawrence indicates that tobacco formed the saga of several generations of his family in America (47). Moreover, he views slavery as a "cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty" (191). Evidently, "slavery is the simplest and most direct form of exploitation of man by man" (Cornforth 50).

On the whole, American slavery was an institution in which the relationship between master and slave inevitably entailed Africans as natally alienated or socially dead persons. This idea is borrowed from Orlando Patterson who defines a slave as a "socially dead, alienated from all 'rights' or claims of birth, who ceased to belong in his own right to any legitimate social order" (279). He makes clear, "all slaves experienced, at the very least, a secular excommunication" (177). He concludes: "The slave was socially alienated and ceased to belong to any formally recognized community" (280). In other words, the slave life was at the stake of trauma and it was so well understood that it needed no explanation.

The traumatic condition of the black folk

Chattel slavery, which implied the capture, transportation, harboring of Africans by force, conditioned them in a position of vulnerability and all kinds of abuse. As they were reduced to the status of beasts of burden, they were exposed to all sorts of horrors. The term "trauma" originates from the Greek trauma which means "wound." The term "wound" can be viewed as both physical and psychic wounds. As physical trauma always leaves a deep psychological effects, they are intertwined.

Indeed, like the other African American families, Lawrence Jackson's father's grandfather, Edward Jackson, and great-grandfather, Granville Hundley, had experienced the horror of slavery. His "grandfather's father, Edward Jackson, was born into American chattel slavery around 1855" (43). That is to say, two generations of his family had been enslaved. As slavery ended with the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, his father and his grandfather were born out of slavery. Although Lawrence Jackson indicates that his grandfather was born in 1918, he does not mention his grandfather's birth date. But the reader is informed that his father's great-grandfather originated from Guinea on the first page of the book because his father himself has visited that African country as the origin of their family perhaps after tracing back the genealogy of their family. Thus, the first generation of his family was a slave captive and was sold. And to insist on the cruelty of slave trade, Jackson quotes Thomas Jefferson by defining it in these terms: "a cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation hither..." (191).

If Lawrence Jackson does not deeply depict the conditions of his great-great-fathers' enslavement because he has less information, sometimes he makes a detailed description of the slave conditions in general. That description shows that slaves were physically and biologically subjected to the barbarity and brutality of their masters; which resulted in disabilities and even death. As evidence, the overseers regularly inflicted punishment universally known as "correction and chastisement" (63). That is the reason why when talking about the physical and psychological effects of slavery, Lawrence Jackson supports that "enslavement appears to have been quite stressful and was capable of causing premature aging" (98). This quotation justifies David Spiegel's description of the essence of traumatic stress as a loss of control over one's body when he states: "The mental imprint of such frightening experiences sometimes takes the form of loss of control over parts of one's mind – identity, memory, and consciousness – just as physical control is regained" (1). Having no control over their selves, slaves were not able to construct their own identities.

The first trauma we are going to deal with is the naming and renaming of slaves. Thus, Slave names were assigned to them all. In any case, from the first slaves transported from Africa to the young slaves born in America, the slave masters assigned them new names as soon as they were acquired. The purpose of this practice corresponded to the idea of reducing the Negro to a domestic animal. The white master deprived the Black of the elementary identity marks that are the name and the first name. As a matter of fact, Lawrence Jackson's father's great-grandfather and his grandfather don't bear the same names: Granville Hundley is his father's great-grandfather's name and Edward Jackson is his father's grandfather's name. Normally, their family name should be Hundley instead of Jackson. From the first generation to the second, their family name had changed. But neither Hundley nor Jackson are African names. Jackson remains a popular name so that it is difficult to distinguish between several black families by this English name. In this sense, the title of the book itself, *My Father's Name*, is meaningful. Moreover, if after the Emancipation Proclamation, newly freed slaves renamed themselves, they did not recover their African names or identity.

Another thing is the fact that slaves did not enjoy any family life because breakup families were commonplace. The so-called marriages for Blacks tended to take place at a distance, and the relation flourished during the seasonal breaks of the intense labor system. Slave masters arrogated the term family to include people they owned, which perhaps made the "family" of a white slave master, a black woman, and her children a symbolical complete unit. This explains the fact that Lawrence Jackson had felt obliged to do research before knowing about his great great-grandparents.

As far as culture is concerned, Africans separated from the African continent have suffered cultural alienation. They had been separated from their respective cultures and had lost the control and mastery of African cultural values. As a result, they had succeeded to keep a very small part of the cultural heritage of Africa. Therefore, if African music had resisted their uprooting through the practice of the Blues, Jazz, and the Gospel not only in America but all over the world, English for example has become the only language they speak. Then, although Lawrence Jackson himself has always prided himself on his ability to speak Southern vernacular, or at least to understand it, he has lost forever the African language he should speak.

As we notice, the black folk's soul crushing started in the seventeenth century since the beginning of the chattel slavery and it continued after the American Civil War when the Freedmen's Bureau failed to help former slaves integrate American society. Lawrence Jackson even indicates that white supremacists wanted to re-enslave African Americans during the Reconstruction era. If they partially failed, some events demonstrated an "extraordinary value that white men and women born after the Civil War put on creating "negroes" who completely lacked valor"(84). As a result, another form of

slavery called racial segregation, was instituted with the Jim Crow laws[3]. And Whites continued to abuse African Americans. On the one hand, such a trauma, experienced by African Americans in general, is referred to as a historical trauma by Brandon Jones M. A., a psychotherapist and behavioral health consultant. For him, "a historical trauma is an example of intergenerational trauma. It's caused by events that target a group of people. Thus, even family members who have not directly experienced the trauma can feel the effects of the event generations later" (16).

On the other hand, the trauma experienced by the new generations of African Americans such as Lawrence Jackson due to racism and their slave background can also be qualified as a Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome[4], a theory coined by Dr. Joy DeGruy. (510) Brandon Jones M. A. paraphrases her by supporting that the "Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome is a "condition that exists as a consequence of centuries of chattel slavery followed by institutionalized racism and oppression have resulted in multigenerational adaptive behavior, some positive reflecting resilience, and others that are harmful and destructive" (17). Finally, the trauma experienced by them appears to be like an indelible sore which is part of their identity. Then, slavery has always been the founding of a trans-generational trauma, which will affect their life forever.

Conclusion

To end, the American chattel slavery was a racialized slavery, which was grounded on the concept of Otherness. Its justification was possible thanks to the conception of an ideological difference between Blacks and Whites. Therefore, being white meant to be better, and being black meant to belong to sub-humanity or to a commoditized being. As the South was a rural area whose economy was based on agriculture, it was the place where slavery was more materialized. Undoubtedly, slavery has physically, mentally, and culturally affected African Americans. The trauma experienced by them appears to be like an indelible sore which is part of their identity. It is also a trans-generational trauma which will affect their life forever. Thus, the south of the United States of America and slavery have caused the crushing of the black folk's soul. It is in this context

3 Jim Crow was a set of laws and social customs requiring racial segregation. From 1881 to 1964, Jim Crow laws separated Americans by race in 26 states. From Delaware to California, and from North Dakota to Texas, many states (and cities, too) could impose legal punishments on people for consorting with members of another race. The most common types of laws forbade intermarriage and ordered business owners and public institutions to keep their black and white clientele separated. However, Jim Crow laws covered almost every possible area of human contact.

4 In her *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*, Dr. Joy DeGruy defines the Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome in these terms: "Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome is a condition that exists when a population has experienced multigenerational trauma resulting from centuries of slavery and continues to experience oppression and institutionalized racism today." (510)

W. E. B. Dubois has coined the "Double Consciousness", a term describing the internal conflict experienced by African Americans in an oppressive society (2).

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Abstract: The objective of this paper is to examine the particular oppressive experiences of Blacks who became the beast of burden of the peculiar institution, a system of dehumanization that reduced them to simple objects in the South. In *My Father's Name*, through the study of a black Virginia family and its neighborhood, Lawrence P. Jackson makes a recall of the horror of slavery and Blacks' struggle for freedom in the Postbellum South. Indeed, Jackson reconstructs sequences of Edward Jackson and Granville Hundley's lives, respectively his father's grandfather and great-grandfather, two black men who experienced slavery and Reconstruction. As the South was a place that combined the materiality, the meaning, and the practice of slavery, it is viewed as a nebulous which made it difficult for African descents to construct their own identity. Thus, it was a place combining the location and locale of the physical and cultural alienation of the black folk. This idea is supported by Karl Marx's historical materialism which sustains that under capitalism the inhumane process of acquiring slaves came to resemble that of acquiring raw materials because Africans were dehumanized and commoditized. In such circumstances of soul-crushing, feelings, and emotions shared by Blacks were essentially related to their slave

status. Openly, American slavery was a racialized slavery based on the concept of Otherness chiefly originated from the use of the notions of "being white" and "better" to establish differences between human races and to consequently view the white as a superior being. This explains the option of black slaves as a response to white settlers' concern not only to get a robust and resilient workforce within their reach but also to have to manage a population accustomed to a climate similar to the American climate in their imperial expansion.
Keywords: soul-crushing, slavery, otherness, dehumanization, alienation.

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Liminality and Beyond: Conceptions of In-betweenness in American Culture and Literature

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THE ROLE OF IMAGINATION IN THE CREATION OF TRANSNATIONAL SUBJECTIVITIES IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S *LEAVE IT TO ME*

Introduction

In his seminal book *Modernity at Large*, published in 1996, Arjun Appadurai famously stated that "globalization is ... marked by a new role for imagination in social life" (13). Offering his perspective on the phenomenon of globalization, the theorist underscores the role of imagination in the formation of global communities and transnational identities, as well as the issue of agency, which is closely connected to it. Interestingly, Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Leave It To Me* (1997), published only a year after Appadurai's book, seems to be built around the same concept that organizes Appadurai's theory, namely, the power of imagination in the formation of new subjectivities. In this article I intend to discuss the role of imagination in Mukherjee's novel, how it is stirred by global flows and how, in return, it has a powerful impact on shaping the flows, particularly ethnoscapes. It is my concern to indicate how the novelist portrays the creation of "imagined communities" and cultures of violence. Following Appadurai's argument about imagination's connection to agency, the active role of the protagonist in her discovery as well as formation of identity will be explored. As the novel participates in the process of rethinking of national identity, national belonging and the questions of home, the purpose of this article is to show how Mukherjee renders the complexity of identities in the times of global deterritorialization and transnational connectivities, and to reflect on the power of ethnoscapes, which open up space for new imaginaries of belonging.

Globalization and the role of imagination

Similarly to other theorists of globalization (see Bauman, Beck), Appadurai portrays globalization as characterized by liquidity and instability, and makes flows his metaphor for chaos, randomness, and lack of systematic structure. He identifies five global cultural flows: ethnoscape, technoscape, financescape, mediascape, and ideoscape (33-36). Their

names created with the suffix "scape" allow us to understand the fluid, irregular shapes that characterize international capital and indicate that they are not visibly the same from each angle but are influenced by historical, linguistic, and political situations. By "ethnoscapes" Appadurai refers to all those people in constant motion such as migrants, refugees, guest workers or tourists who "affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree" (33). It is difficult for these people to generate permanent "imaginaries" even if they wanted to as they constantly move around. Their mobility results in the production of diverse identities, which are unstable and fluid. While "financescape" is the rise of global capital and exchanges, "technoscape" refers to the development and spread of technology through different national boundaries. "Mediascape" refers to the rise in media production and distribution e.g. newspapers, television, radio, film and social media. These forms of media provide the "narrative" to which different communities live their lives and form "imagined worlds" as reality and fiction become indistinct from one another. By "ideoscape" Appadurai refers to the ideologies of states, which often repeat concepts such as democracy, freedom and rights.

These flows produce a world full of diverse identities, and diversified culture. The traditional distinction between the center and periphery is questioned. Appadurai's reflection is in line with James Clifford's earlier attempt to adequately describe the globalizing world, which mixes and mingles various cultural elements, but does not necessarily stride in the direction of a unified cultural vision. In his *The Predicament of Culture* (1988) Clifford writes:

> This century has seen a drastic expansion of mobility, including tourism, migrant labor, immigration, urban sprawl. More and more people "dwell" with the help of mass transit, automobiles, airplanes. In cities on six continents foreign populations have come to stay-mixing in but often in partial, specific fashions. The "exotic" is uncannily close. Conversely, there seem no distant places left on the planet where the presence of "modern" products, media, and power cannot be felt. An older topography and experience of travel is exploded. One no longer leaves home confident of finding something radically new, another time or space. Difference is encountered in the adjoining neighborhood, the familiar turns up at the ends of the earth. (Clifford 13-4)

What transpires from this fragment is a basic feature of globalization: shrinking of the world, decreased importance of spatial and temporal distances, which results in "the 'exotic' uncannily close" and the perception that "'Cultural' difference is no longer a stable, exotic otherness" (Clifford 14). The world is in flux, or, as Appadurai would phrase it, in a flow, bringing into proximity cultural elements of disparate stable structures, which may often result in "unintended effects", that is, hybridizing cultures and producing cultural impurities.

What Appadurai brings into the discussion of the globalizing tendencies and the formation of transnational identities is the role of imagination. As he explains in the

introduction to *Modernity at Large*, it is mainly the impact of the media and human mobility that have the potential of affecting the imagination, and therefore shaping modern subjectivity on a large scale: "Implicit in this book is a theory of rupture that takes media and migration as its two major, and interconnected, diacritics and explores their joint effect on the *work of the imagination* as a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity" (3). It is indisputable that media are important sources of images, conveying new visions or narratives, and thus creating desires, as well as pointing to the ways of their realization. Moreover, as Appadurai indicates, also people on the move can become propellers of imagination: "few persons in the world today do not have a friend, relative, or coworker who is not on the road to somewhere else or already coming back home, bearing stories and possibilities" (4). The novelty of Appadurai's concept regarding the imagination is that it is no longer the domain of "specially endowed (charismatic) individuals" (5), a matter of creative genius within the aesthetic realm, but it is an element of everyday life, available to ordinary people, and therefore democratic in its nature. What transpires from Appadurai's words is the fact that more people in more parts of the world can think of a greater range of possibilities for their lives due to the increased circulation of images and narratives across the national borders in the global exchange of cultural capital.

The modern social imagination, which can be defined as an organized field of social practices through which individuals and communities picture and work toward new possibilities for how they want to live, may be disruptive for institutions which were previously regarded as the hallmarks of modernity, e.g. the nation-state. Since many people live in diasporas, they are deterritorialized and spread out around the world, they also constantly imagine their homeland, consider themselves a part of it and therefore create what Benedict Anderson calls "imagined communities", for, as the author of *Modernity at Large* explains, "globalization has … obscured the lines between temporary locales and imaginary national attachments" (Appadurai 9-10). That remains not without an influence on culture, which, as Clifford observed (13-4), is diversified by the new cultural elements introduced in the relatively stable cultural structure. Furthermore, Appadurai argues that culture is no longer equivalent to what Pierre Bourdieu would regard as "habitus", that is, "a tacit realm of reproducible practices and dispositions" (44) but rather "an arena for conscious choice, justification, and representation" (44). So what is emphasized is the agency of the subject – active participation in creating culture, the work one has to do in order to maintain one's connections, and, as a result, voluntariness and consciousness of shaping one's identity. The transnational communication, migrations and therefore deterritorialization of subjects may weaken the nation-state, destabilize this structure, which loses control over the lives of their citizens, who form other attachments and thus belong to other structures.

Accordingly, it can be observed that Appadurai puts considerable emphasis on the issue of agency in connection to imagination. Not only does he underscore the active role of the subject in maintaining or refashioning of one's identity but also he indicates the possibility of action as available to ordinary people whose life is some kind of predicament: "even the meanest and most hopeless of lives, the most brutal and dehumanizing of circumstances, the harshest of lived inequalities are now open to the play of the imagination" (Appadurai 54). In other words, even though the results of globalization may be negative and people suffer, they may imagine new lives for themselves, they can still make decisions and act in their particular circumstances, for "The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order" (Appadurai 31).

Imagination as a social practice in *Leave It to Me*

Leave it to Me is one of the most "transnational" novels in Bharati Mukherjee's oeuvre. In a way it continues the agenda of her earlier novel, *The Holder of the World* (1993), which aims to undermine the belief that new immigrants are a disintegrating element for the US nation. *The Holder of the World* achieves its goal through the portrayal of the cultural complexity of the US pre-national beginnings and the depiction of global liaisons in which the colonial world participated, the mutual net of dependencies of national economies, which were based on international exchanges of people (settlers, slaves, laborers), goods (sugar, cotton, gold), currency, and ideas. With its emphasis on a profoundly multicultural arena of the colonial period, which managed to create a unified and efficient system of co-operation, and led to the emergence of a nation, *The Holder of the World* can be interpreted as an attempt to dispel the US fears of a new, post-1965, wave of immigration (Filipczak, "Reclaiming the Multicultural Past" 4), which is perceived as extremely diverse. *Leave It To Me* portrays the globalizing moment in a full swing and therefore it tries to picture "a number of effects of transnationalism on people and their fates" (Nyman, "Imagining Transnationalism" 403), as well as a redefinition of the notions of belonging and home. This article intends to offer a fuller picture of Mukherjee's envisioning of globalization through the discussion of the role of the imagination and agency in the formation of contemporary subjectivities. This is linked to the theme of conscious decision and voluntariness in choosing one's identity and, consequently, national belonging, which can be identified in her other literary works as well, e.g. *Desirable Daughters* (Filipczak, "I changed because I wanted to" 46-9). Following Appadurai's statement that "our own ethnographies of literature can become exercises in the interpretation of the new role of the imagination in social life" (61), Mukherjee's novel can be considered one such exercise as well.

In the fictional world of the novel, global flows are a constitutive feature of the world and human lives at the turn of the century. Mukherjee constructs her protagonist as a "product" and object of transnational connections, who sets off on the search to discover her identity inspired by other people, and imagines a possibility of a different life. As Jopi Nyman notices, the protagonist is "embedded in the globalization of culture since (and before) her birth" ("Imagining Transnationalism" 403; *Home, Identity, and Mobility* 215). Indeed, since the protagonist, Debby DiMartino, is a child adopted from an Indian orphanage into an Italian-American family, she is an object of international adoption trade, and, as it turns out later, also her biological parents represent transnational networks peculiar to the 1960s and early 70s, since her mother is an American hippie travelling to India and the father is identified as an Asian National. The novel renders how the protagonist's initial lack of knowledge of her roots results in her cultural indeterminacy and confusion, and sets her off on the search to find out who her biological parents are.

Appadurai underlines the role of mediascapes and migrations in the formation of imagination which induces a subject to action. In the construction of her protagonist, Mukherjee initially emphasizes human encounters, they stir Debby's imagination to the point that she no longer wishes to follow the known scripts and predictable outcomes. She aims to uncover her past as well as imagine a possible future for herself. Thus, the first important moment which leads to a conscious shaping of her life is after the social worker, Wyatt, discovers Debby's adoption papers, reads her files and inspires her to crave for more, "I'm saying you've got a chance, don't blow it. You might never have made it out of that orphanage" (13). He fills her imagination with the possible pictures for the future, just like the media would: "You know, Debby, I can tell you're going to be tall and beautiful very soon, and someday you're going to be rich and powerful" (14). At this point she no longer desires easy identification with her foster parents, the DiMartinos, but senses a certain complexity of her roots which awakens her expectations. Already in junior high school, Debby feels that "whole peoples … brawled inside [her]" (15), she had the "monstrous cravings of other Debbys hiding inside" (18), she finally desires that her "other life, [her] *real* life, would find [her]" (18). She is certain she does not want to follow into her sister Angie's footsteps, which would mean imitating her "modest transformation" (18) and going on a predictable route to Manhattan. Another formative person is her first lover, Frankie Fong, who creates in Debby a desire to learn the truth of her origins through the descriptions of his childhood: "Frankie needed to remember, and I needed to discover. He talked. But I wanted more; I wanted details, wanted to know the smell of fishing boats on Thai canals and the sound of monsoon rains on tin roofs" (26). With no memories to hang on to, she feels "robbed of" her Asian childhood (26), yet due to his stories of Frankie's past travels and business she starts

to feel a connection. She wants to learn more about her biological parents, of whom she only knows that mother was a hippie named Clear Water Iris-Daughter, while the father is referred to as an Asian National in the adoption papers. Cherishing a desire to embark on a new life trajectory, she envisions her foster parents as "the aliens" (27) and declares her openness to novelty: "I can imagine myself into any life" (28).

The novel takes up Appadurai's concept about democratization of imagination. According to the author of *Modernity at Large*, imagination should be perceived as an element of everyday life, by no means available only to special or chosen individuals (5). Following this premise, Mukherjee asks a question about whether it is still possible to be considered special in these global times, when both mobility and opportunity (sometimes necessity) to change one's life becomes the experience of large masses of people. When Fred Pointer, the detective hired by Devi, says she is special because "Two continents went into [her] making" (105), Devi's neighbor, Linda, is unwilling to agree with the statement. For her a reason for being special is the very fact of existing, but not the fact of human mobility or intricacies of human life paths: "I'm not saying you aren't special, Devi. … But so's everyone. Take anyone in our building, take anyone in the universe" (117). In the time of global flows, the mere fact of dislocation, crossing the borders, is not sufficient for an extraordinary existence. Ultimately, Debby agrees with Linda: "I accepted Linda's chastisement. Every life is special. Some wondrous events transpire without making headlines" and muses on Linda's life trajectory, which, in the globalizing world, where great numbers of people are on the move for various reasons, and distance is no longer problematic, appears to be one of numerous similar scenarios: "born in a displaced-persons camp in Germany, spoke her first word (*cuidado!*) in Argentina, married a Japanese doctor in Brazil and divorced him in Chile, then found fulfillment as a psychic in the Haight" (117-8). Although Linda's life story is certainly a lot for a single person, it only imitates multiple lives in the transnational times. On the other hand, a question could be raised whether Mukherjee, just like Appadurai, does not overestimate the role of an individual in imagining and thus creating new lives; in fact, despite the media impact and great opportunities for travel, still many people stay put in one place (although not unified ethnically), never leave their region, and remain attached to their surroundings (Pancewicz-Puchalska 98).

Also other characters in the novel demonstrate the power of imagination, that is, how it induces them to action and refashioning of identity. One notable example is the protagonist's Bio-Dad, Romeo Hawk. He is a grandson of a Pakistani who settled down in Indochina. When he tells Debby the story how the family changed their surname, he points to the motives connected with global flows:

> Our surname – your name – was spelled H-a-q-u-e by then. H-a-q to H-a-q-u-e was strictly an economic decision. A penniless man makes his way out of Peshawar or someplace equally

> filthy, and peddles cigarettes, chewing gum, dirty cards in *Indochine* cities. Ib Haq was an okay moniker for that man. His son upgrades Haq to Haque, buys himself a Eurasian whore for a wife, and makes what living he can driving pedicabs on the crowded streets of Saigon. Haque's son, yours truly, Americanizes his name to H-a-w-k, and procures for GIs to-die-for dreams. … We're talking imagination on the grand scale, Miss Dee. (Mukherjee, *Leave* 219)

The change of names results not only from the movement from one place to another but also a desire to live in a different manner. The first change, from Haq – to Haque, is explained as an economic decision, but, in fact, it is rooted in the experience of migration, blending in with the French culture of Indochina. The second change is explained as a kind of Americanization. This decision can be attributed to what Appadurai calls the mediascapes. The impact of the media and their global circulation of images inspire the "Euroasian man", as he is referred to in various parts of the book, to Westernize his surname, as well as his way of life, as he "procures for GIs to-die-for dreams".

Accordingly, the figure of Romeo Hawk showcases the powerful influence of the mediascapes on imagination and in particular its potential of creating cultures of violence. In his discussion of the media impact Appadurai ponders on the effects of circulation of martial arts tradition. He argues that the movie industry contributes to the creation of "new cultures of masculinity and violence" which may lead to the lead to the upsurge of violence even on the international level:

> The transnational movement of the martial arts, particularly through Asia, as mediated by the Hollywood and Hong Kong film industries (Zarilli 1995) is a rich illustration of the ways in which long-standing martial arts traditions, reformulated to meet the fantasies of contemporary (sometimes lumpen) youth populations, create new cultures of masculinity and violence, which are in turn the fuel for increased violence in national and international politics. (Appadurai 40-1)

The motif of martial arts, as well as real and imaginary (movie) violence, is conspicuous in Mukherjee's novel. It extends beyond the national borders and links many characters together, in this way showing its transnational character. The novel demonstrates how the knowledge of pop-culture, which is a major repository of visual elements, ideas, practices circulated by the media, can become a basis for communication, and can therefore connect people in certain "imagined communities". The media presence and their influence is signaled already at the beginning of the novel in the figure of Francis "Flash" Fong, a "star/director/producer of dozens of Hong-Kong kick boxing extravaganzas" (24). Debby's knowledge of Fong's movies wins her a job at Hamilton Cohan's agency, and she is amazed at the discovery of "the Flash connection" (84) between herself and her boss, which perhaps later helps them even to begin an intimate relationship. Debby's biological father, a serial killer, is clearly an example of participation in a culture of violence, while Debby's narration reveals how her consciousness is influenced by

the image of a movie hero Flash, when she compares one of her father's embodiments to him: "Ma Varuna glided off the hotel sofa with the Flash's kick-boxing speed and strength" (208). As she later discovers her father's identity and the fact of him being a serial killer, she describes his hands as "Karate-hardened hands. Flash hands. Killer hands" (214). Finally, it is Nyman's observation that when at the end of the narrative Debby commits parricide, she performs as a kick-boxing actor and as a supernatural goddess. The influence of globally circulated movie images which shape the imagination and propel characters to action is clearly evident in the novel. What Appadurai believes to be the national and international increase of violence due to mediascapes, in Mukherjee's novel is fictionalized in the figure of Romeo Hawk, a deterritorialized serial killer with an Americanized name and numerous fake identities and passports, who operates in various locations around the globe.

The value of agency

Mukherjee constructs her protagonist as a transnational subject, who maintains her identity as fluid and is convinced that this positionality is most accurate in the present global moment. Debby's indeterminacy connects her to numerous deterritorialized subjects populating the novel, while stressing the opportunity of choosing her cultural positioning point to the redefinition of the notion of home and accentuate the agency of the female subject. The protagonist's active role in shaping her life is exposed: it stems from her awoken imagination as well as becomes a necessity for her. The experience of the "old immigration" is considered obsolete: it no longer corresponds with the experience of "new", current migrants, who are often deterritorialized subjects belonging to "imagined communities" and not seeking rootedness in a place.

Accordingly, the novel shows a rupture between a belief in fate and imagination. While the former results in the protagonist's inertia, the latter is an awoken desire to find out the truth of her origins and transform her life, which makes her abandon her family home and search for the answers. The shift from the irrational to the rational is emphasized, complacency with one's destiny is replaced with decision-making and taking action. Thus, when the first man to put Debby on the search for her biological parents, Wyatt, wonders why she never before showed any interest in her origins, Debby answers, explaining her passivity: "I always figured it was fate" (12). In the course of time, it is mainly Debby's imagination at work that influences her behavior, which means her increased awareness of possibilities available to her, and voluntariness in using them. In her search to find out more about her true identity and also to recreate herself, Debby turns into an active subject: "From the families I'd been given, I'd scavenge the traits I needed and dump the rest. If a person is given *lives* to live instead

of just one life (Mama's favorite soap), especially lives she hasn't even touched, she'll be far better off for it" (14). She goes on a journey to discover her origins, that is, the identity of her biological parents and the circumstances of her adoption.

With the emphasis laid on the question of agency Mukherjee does not claim simply that travelling or journeys are an important factor in changing one's personality. Various scholars stress the transforming power of a journey and relocations (Sarup 98, McDowell 210), yet, it seems that for Mukherjee's characters, transformation of identity is primarily a matter of conscious choice and desire to change, which is often verbalized by protagonists or demonstrated in the construction of characters, who may embody entirely different ideas of belonging, despite their relocation, as is the case of *Desirable Daughters*. In *Leave It to Me* the protagonist's willingness to change stems from the awoken imagination that she does not need to imitate the traditional route (as her half-sister Angie did, going to Manhattan) but can picture herself in any way she desires. Ultimately, it also turns out that she does not search for a stable home, or putting down roots, although upon her arrival to San Francisco, she claims the Haight to be "My space, my turf, my *homeland*" (68; emphasis original). Nevertheless, what attracts her to this place is its syncretism and indeterminacy, the features with which she identifies, and which therefore present her more as a transnational subject, participant of global flows, than a US citizen.

In fact, Mukherjee draws a distinction between "old" and "new" immigrants in the US and shows the currency of the often deterritorialized lives, which remain in the net of dependencies and connections instead of displaying a loyalty to just one state. Debby's foster parents, the DiMartinos, are immigrants of the old type, who integrated into American society and built their new home in the US. Their story and cultural positioning are pretty straightforward and one-directional, because they belong to the type of immigrants who "knew who they were. They knew what they inherited" (53). Debby relates to the latter type of immigrants, transnationals, who have the experience of multiple locales and cultures, and maintain connections with various parts of the globe. The problem that appears at the beginning of the narrative, of an adopted orphan's lack of knowledge who she is and where she comes from, may be read, in fact, as a literal statement of the problems with belonging that becomes an experience of migrants for whom deterritorialization is the primary experience. However, not every character in the novel perceived this state as a predicament. For Frankie Fong, it is a natural environment, he is part of media-, finance- and ethnoscapes: this former kick-boxing movie star seeks investments independent of national boundaries. As he is in no need of permanent attachment or "home", Debby states: "Frankie wasn't an immigrant the way that Paolo DiMartino had been. No steerage, no crippling gratitude"

(29). Both Frankie's movies, business and a recreation of his childhood are in flux, in constant global circulation.

The beginning of the narrative is already quite explicit about Debby's vision of identity. She does not wish to be associated with some stable point of reference. When her first lover, Frankie, calls her "exotic" and links her with Merle Oberon[1] (33), he guesses correctly that she has South Asian roots and that she might have been deterritorialized. However, when he tries to fit her in a roughly corresponding cultural frame, she forcefully rejects this vision, giving preference to the position of fluidity, and, perhaps more importantly, stressing the opportunity of choosing her cultural positioning:

> "It's your eyes. … It's the way you walk. Like women in Burma balancing jugs on their heads…" "Hey," I objected, "I don't do jugs!" I didn't give a damn about what women in Burma wore for hats. "I'm adopted." My voice sounded firmer, bolder, the second time. Not *I was adopted*, but *I am adopted*, meaning I want you to know that we've both invented ourselves, you couldn't have found another woman as much like you as I am if you'd taken out personals. (italics in the original, 33-4)

The protagonist represents herself as subject to the process of transformation, not in the past, but at present – continuously refashioning herself. This is what she chooses to do, and thus she takes status of an independent and fully active female.

In multicultural San Francisco characterized by fluidity and instability, the features which are even more explicitly rendered than the hybrid character of the place, the protagonist finds the space of belonging, she claims it as a home, nevertheless, it does not seem to result in her stability or putting down roots. The Haight is an irregular and constantly changing ethnoscape, which may be surprising with its composition, and completely unpredictable. In the rooming house in which Debby rents a room, other residents come from a variety of places: there is a retired Belgian chocolatier, Somali medical student, Serbian photographer, Vietnam vet. There is even a political refugee from Vanuatu, and Debby's astonishment that she has never heard of such a place (97), only reinforces the sense of the unpredictable routes of ethnic flows and their unprecedented scale: "Everything was flow, a spontaneous web without compartments. Somalia, Vanuatu, Vietnam, Belgium, India-Schenectady. Forty years ago it was a big one-family house, probably Italian" (98). In the ever-changing environment the best course of action is acceptance of fluidity, mingling, and indeterminacy, and Debby declares: "Go with the flow … keep your identity – your only asset – liquid" (218).

Consequently, Mukherjee's novel never brings up the issue of fear of others, or strangers, but shows an acceptance of great diversification of identities, taking for granted both the possibility of multiple selves and hybridization of identities. Thus, Debby DiMartino from Shenectady, NY can acquire a new name and identity as Devi

1 A British actress born in 1911 in Bombay (British India then) and died in 1979 in California, US.

Dee in San Francisco, CA, moreover, working for Frankie Fong as a telemarketer she "trie[s] out thirty personas" nightly, and the discovery of her biological parents indicates her "mongrelized" self. Other characters do not display stable identities either; for instance, Debby's Bio-Mom, that is, Jess DuPree's other identities and false passports are revealed (214-5), while her Bio-Dad – Romeo Hawk – is known as Ma Varuna, formerly Bette Ann Krutch of Delaware, so he plays with his gender identity as well. For Nyman Debby's fluidity, and it can be assumed that other characters' as well, functions as a critique of essentialist appeals to authentic ethnicity ("Imagining Transnationalism" 409), while "the treatment of nations and borders in Mukherjee's novel can be seen to criticize, if not to recast, our understanding of home ("Imagining Transnationalism" 412). Nevertheless, it is perhaps more accurate to state that in *Leave It to Me* Mukherjee attempts to present and help us understand a new type of immigrant in the US, whose presence points to the global connections of the US, and the global character of the presence of the US in the world. The novel can be thus a great resource for, to use Paul Lauter's words: "understanding America in the world and the world in America" (14).

Conclusions

Mukherjee's *Leave It to Me* participates in a global, or transnational culture, which has become a component of American cultural life. It is not the homogenization or Americanization of global culture that the novelist tries to record but a "contemporary globalizing of American culture (Lauter 9), a process noticed by not only global theorists but also literary critics, of which Lauter writes: "Whether one is talking about hip-hop or current fiction, what is being produced in the U.S. exists in a text-milieu, if not yet a society, less defined by national boundaries than by international flows of people, goods, dollars, and, of course, cultures" (9). For many writers in western languages, including English, national boundaries are much less meaningful. This is relevant also in the case of Mukherjee's novel, whose protagonist may never leave the US, but remains a "product" and object of global flows, and only in the second place is rendered as a US citizen, though culturally hybridized.

Mukherjee's vision of the role of imagination in the creation of modern transnational subjectivities corresponds with Appadurai's observations of both the power of human narrative or testimony transmitted in direct encounters as well as images and stories circulated by the media. The exposition of imagination is linked directly to the question of agency, engagement in the fulfillment of one's desires and consciousness of one's potency. In this way Mukherjee is consistent in conveying an image of a female protagonist who actively (trans)forms her life.

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Abstract: This article draws on Arjun Appadurai's theory of the power of imagination in modern life expressed in his book *Modernity at Large* (1996). In his attempt to capture the chaotic character of globalization, which he identifies as five different flows, or "scapes", Appadurai notices that the flows are mutually constitutive, while migrations and circulation of the media images, so ethnoscapes and mediascapes respectively, affect human imagination and, in the result, shape modern subjectivities. In the article I attempt to expose the role of imagination as represented in Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Leave It To Me* (1997). I explore its impact on the formation of the transnational identities, creation of "imagined communities", and cultures of violence. I also notice its connection to agency, an element which requires considerable attention when analyzing the novel's themes, such as rethinking of national belonging and the questions of home. Accordingly, the purpose of this article is to show how Mukherjee renders the complexity of identities in the times of global deterritorialization and transnational connectivities, and to reflect on the power of ethnoscapes, which open up space for new imaginaries of belonging. Mukherjee draws

a distinction between "old" and "new" immigrants in the US and shows the currency of the often deterritorialized lives, which remain in the net of dependencies and connections instead of displaying a loyalty to just one state. The novel never brings up the issue of fear of others, or strangers, but shows acceptance of great diversification of identities, taking for granted both the possibility of multiple selves and hybridization of identities. It can be therefore concluded that *Leave It to Me* tries to draw a picture of "contemporary globalizing of American culture" (Lauter).
Keywords: globalization, imagination, agency, transnational identities, imagined communities

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Liminality and Beyond: Conceptions of In-betweenness in American Culture and Literature

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BORDERLANDS OF THE IDENTITY: CULTURAL DUALITY AND NATIVE AMERICAN IDENTITY IN LESLIE MARMON SILKO'S *CEREMONY*

Introduction

The condition of in-betweenness has usually been imputed on migrants. This condition is most obvious on migrants by virtue of the two worlds a majority of them "naturally" occupy. It is therefore easy to imagine this as these migrants usually find themselves caught between the world of their departure and that of arrival. This is however not to say that the non-migrants or indigenes do not sometimes find themselves at the crossroads of identity, experiencing as it were, the condition of in-betweenness. The colonial experience has shown ways in which indigenes who remain at home can find themselves within this space of in-betweenness. This is due in part to the cultural displacement through the imposition of a foreign culture on dominated groups. Colonial and other forms of domination are characterised by coercion through various institutions of the dominated into the culture of the dominant class. The result of this is the dominated groups finding themselves in the discomfiting condition of straddling two usually diametrically opposed worlds provoking a crisis of identity. Native American literature besides other questions relevant to the Native American experience, also gives ample place to the question of identity of the Native Americans; who are found straddling the world of their ancestry and that of the invading whites. They experience this by virtue of the unequal interactions they had with the invading white Americans. Their apparent rootedness, that is, being located in their original homes has not exempted them from the identity crisis of unbelonging. Their encounter with the immigrant white population has proved challenging to their sense of identity. This is the situation underscored by Madsen (2016) as follows:

> The tribes of Native North America continue to constitute distinct social and cultural communities, each of which has been shaped in particular ways by the impact of European colonization. The interplay between the indigenous cultures that endure and these colonial impacts form a framework of allusions and references that characterize native American literary texts. (2)

This is the argument this paper intends to expand; to underline that by virtue of the cultural encounters between the colonizing white Americans and the dominated Native Americans, the latter was subjected to a profound cultural violence. This cultural violence pushed them from a place of rootedness and its accompanying certainty to one of rootlessness and unease. This argument is developed in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* which is arguably "one of the first indigenous novels to gain national celebrity" (Madsen, 23). I read this novel as exploring the dynamics of cultural contact and racism and its ensuing dismembering of the Native American personality who finds himself caught in a cultural flux. The protagonist is read as existing in a borderland of identity and struggling to find his way back to a place of cultural rootedness and identity stability.

White hegemony as vector of cultural displacement

The novel *Ceremony* follows the struggles of Tayo a mixed-blooded Laguna Indian who has his feet in two worlds: the indigenous and the white worlds. The opening line of the novels "Tayo didn't sleep well that night" (1) bespeaks the restlessness of in-betweenness. Tayo is a returning war veteran suffering of PTSD. However, a much closer appraisal of his condition indicates that his trauma goes beyond the war experiences. It is a deep-seated discontentment and unease occasioned by the unnatural space he is forced to occupy, caught as it were between two worlds and serving the needs of the white masters whose actions have placed him and his community in an unsettling cultural condition.

The condition of Native Americans as captured in fiction cannot be understood independently of Native American history. This history is amongst many things a history of white conquest subjugation of the Natives. This contact between the Native Americans and the white invaders has played a huge role in placing them in the uncomfortable circumstances in which they find themselves. Reading Tayo's plight against this historical background, Charkin (2002) intimates as follows:

> Certainly, the problem of Tayo's alienation has complex roots. The novel implies that if one is to understand properly Tayo's problem, one must see it in its historical context; that is, one must see it against the background of the tragic story of Native Americans after the arrival of the Europeans. Whole tribes became extinct without any natural resistance to the diseases of the whites; millions of American Indians perished. But *Ceremony* implies that no matter how terrible the deaths from disease and other causes associated with the European colonization were, the most destructive disease the Native Americans suffered as a consequence of European arrival on American shores was despair. (5)

This despair Charkin introduces here is what I extend to tag cultural despair. The Native Americans did not only suffer the physical damage from this encounter but the frag-

mentation of their culture had far-reaching psychic consequences. This pushed them into the traumatic position of in-betweenness puncturing their indigenous identity. Placed within this historical framework, it is not hard to see how whiteness acts as that deforming force that defaces indigenous identity.

The overriding presence of whiteness is captured by the old man Ku'oosh, a medicine man who tries to expunge Tayo's malaise. He notes that "there are some things we can't cure like we used to […] not since the white people came" (31). Ku'oosh here indicates that important aspects of their culture have been lost by virtue of their forced interaction with whites. The whites have overturned the cultural world of the indigenes such that some of their healing rites and rituals have lost their power.

Even though these Indians are the indigenes of America, the intrusion of whites has produced different levels of displacement for these Indians that they have to constantly seek acceptance into the society. For the Indians to be accepted as Americans, they must show proof that they are willing to make the ultimate sacrifice; which is laying down their lives for America by joining the war effort. This is the situation Tayo recounts as follows:

> One time there were these Indians, see. They put on uniforms, cut their hair. They went off to a big war. They had a real good time too. Bars served them booze, remember that, because that's all they were, Indians. These Indians fucked white women, they had as much as they wanted too […] These Indians got treated as anyone. (59)

This is what the marine uniform represents. It is their badge and marker of acceptability within America. The rejection constitutes part of white hegemony whereby Indians are considered and treated as sub-humans by virtue of their racial and cultural difference. Whiteness is positioned as the standard and Indians have to strive to attain this. Tayo's plight is worsened by this rejection and he notes that not until he makes himself available to serve in the war is he recognised "white women never looked at me until I put on that uniform, and then by God I was a U.S. Marine and they came crowding around" (33). So, unknown to them, the attention they receive, is for the duration of the time they have the uniform on. There is a wide divide between being Indian and being American which the Indians have to bridge by proving they are American through joining the Marines and going off to war. The only Indian worthy of recognition is one in a Marine uniform.

The end of the war strips them of this acceptance and once again they find themselves as outcasts. This has a traumatic effect on them and the result is their indulging in heavy drinking and merry-making in an attempt to recreate those foregone moments of belonging. But Tayo is quick to observe the futility of these acts when he notes "here we trying to bring back that old feeling, that feeling they belonged to America the way

they felt during to war" (36). For these Indians, belonging to America is not a given. Tayo underscores this in these words:

> I'm half-breed. I'll be the first to say it. I'll speak for both sides. First time you walked down the street in Gallup or Albuquerque, you knew. Don't lie. You knew right away. The war was over, the uniform was gone. All of a sudden that man at the store waits on you last, makes you wait until all the white people bought what they wanted. And the white lady at the bus depot, she's real careful now not to touch your hand when she counts out your change. (35)

Even though they are the first inhabitants of the land, they now have to earn belonging and acceptance and even so, it is not on a permanent basis. The contrast between the two circumstances - during and after the war - cannot be overemphasized. But it is noteworthy that Indians are made to occupy a subaltern position in their own country. For the duration that they are adorned in the U.S. Marine uniform, they are accepted, because of the uniform which symbolizes readiness to sacrifice one's life for the nation. It is only at the point of self-sacrifice that Indians receive some measure of temporary acceptance. After the war, they are subjected to the same forms of racial violence and microaggressions denying them their full personhood within American society.

Most minority American literature underscores the ways groups are maligned and marginalized within America because they do not fit into some racialized standards set by the dominant white America. For many of them, the result is an acute sense of unbelonging which for some leads to the undertaking of self-negating rituals with the aim to adopt aspects acceptable to what has been positioned as mainstream America. This causes these members of these minority groups to lose aspects of their cultural identities and consequently finding themselves neither fully in nor fully out. This is what constitutes the borderlands of identities which is the space occupied by Tayo and the other Indians.

These self-negating rituals are sometimes aided by the racist education system which downgrades the culture of the minority group, creating in them nothing but disdain for their indigenous culture and awe for the culture of the white America. This propels them to seek to become more like the whites. A good case in point is Rocky in *Ceremony* of whom it is noted:

> He was an A-student and all-state in football and track. He had to win; he said he was always going to win. So, he listened to his teachers and he listened to the coach. They were proud of him, they told him, "nothing can stop you now except one thing: don't let the people at home hold you back". Rocky understood what he had to do to win in the white outside world. After their first year at boarding school in Albuquerque, Tayo saw how Rocky deliberately avoided the old-time ways. Old grandma shook her head at him, but he called it superstition, and he opened his textbooks to show her. He was embarrassed at what they did. (38)

This exemplifies the extent to which the Indians are led to hate and reject themselves and culture by immersing in the culture of whiteness. Rocky here stands as a metaphor for the Indians who are subjected to the brainwashing of the white system to the extent of feeling embarrassed at their indigenous ways. Many critics of Native American literature have underlined the role white education plays in severing the Natives from their culture. Akins (2012) notes that education features as a colonizing force used by white American power structure to coerce and assimilate American Indians. She further cites Peter Kerry Powers who highlights the novel's depiction of the fragmentation of Pueblo traditions and culture as a result of the "story of enlightenment propagated by the educational system" (3). Powers pursues that "the educational system embodies this active forgetting by disengaging Native Americans from traditional views of the landscape and the wildlife around them. In school, cultural aggression wears the thin disguise of useful knowledge" (cited in Akins, 2012:3). It is therefore not difficult to see how in the example of Rocky above, the world of his textbooks has supplanted the world of his traditions and culture. Bhabha (1994) has elaborated adeptly on the power of the book to engender cultural displacement. He observes as follows:

> Written as they are in the name of the father and the author, these texts of the civilizing mission immediately suggest the triumph of the colonialist moment in early English literature. The discovery of the book installs the sign of appropriate representation: the word of God, truth, art creates the conditions for a beginning, a practice of history and narrative. But the institution of the Word in the wilds is also an *Enstellung*, a process of displacement, distortion, dislocation and repetitions. (105)

Bhabha's observation is an effective appraisal of the consequent displacement of native encounter with the world of whiteness through books. These books need not be of English literature as Bhabha notes, but of the hegemonic group that seeks to impose its values on the dominated. The books translate into viable weapons in the hands of the colonizing force in the subtle subjugation of the oppressed. It acts as a method of separation of the indigenes from their roots.

Besides, the brainwashing in the white school, white religion is also a hegemonic structure that negates indigenous Indian identity. This is explicitly detailed in these lines:

> Christianity separated the people from themselves; it tried to crush the single clan name, encouraging each person to stand alone, because Jesus Christ would save only the individual soul: Jesus Christ was not like the Mother who loved and cared for them as her children, as her family. (Silko, 50)

Christian doctrine goes contrary to the indigenous belief system and by imposing Christianity on them, Indians are led to embrace what is most foreign to them. This cultural violence unleashed by white hegemony engenders cultural displacement which the Indians experience. The citation above equally notes the important ways white

culture is made to marginalize and eventually supplant indigenous ways. Christianity here represents the mechanism by which Native American way of life and belief system is overhauled. The Native American culture of solidarity and collection salvation is replaced by individualism through Christian dogmas. Consequently, the Indian subjected to such doctrines loses aspects of his/her cultural identity. Christianity is seen here as a means of cultural displacement and contamination. This draws the Indians into the white cultural experience, naturally obliterating aspects of their own culture and identity. These Native Americans are seen coerced through different structures of the white power system to abandon their indigenous ways and adopt the imported ways. Feuton (2018) underscores that

> Government policies designed to eradicate indigenous culture also worked to convince Native Americans themselves that they must surrender their traditional lives to survive as North American Moderns. (24)

It is against such a backdrop that a character like Rocky becomes embarrassed of his culture and takes a distance from it. Such a move usually places individuals at the crossroads of different cultures because they can hardly ever completely shed their cultural past nor fully adopt the foreign culture projected to them.

White hegemony is presented in *Ceremony* as an oppressive force and this is evident when Tayo is in hospital in Los Angeles after the war. It is noted thus:

> He recognized it then: the thick white skin that had enclosed him, silencing the sensations of living, the love as well as the grief; and he had been left with only the hem if the tissues that enclosed him. He never knew how long he had been lost there, in that hospital in Los Angeles. (135)

The use of phrases and words such as 'thick white skin', 'enclosed him', 'silencing', 'lost' all underlie white hegemony and its oppressive effects. The idea of loss in the white enclosure points to white hegemony as a channel of cultural displacement. So overwhelmed is he by the force of whiteness that he feels all that is left of him is the 'hem of tissues'. Tayo appears to have lost his essence and is merely attempting to reconstruct himself culturally from pieces drawn from the white and Indian worlds respectively. Tayo's plight represents that of the Native Indians who come in contact with the oppressive white culture. This culture does not leave the Indians untouched as expressed by the medicine man Betonie:

> But there was something else now, as Betonie said; it was everything they had seen – the cities, the tall buildings, the noise and the lights, the power of their weapons and the machines. They were never the same after that: they had seen what the white people had made from the stolen land. (96)

The war constituted an arena for the full display of white power through the exhibition of sophisticated weaponry. This impressed the Indians, imprinting feelings of inferiority in them. So, even though the Indians live with the conviction that whites are thieves who grabbed their lands from them, their encounter with white power, especially during the war begins to puncture this conviction, leading them to perceive whites differently as expressed thus: "the people had been taught to despise themselves because they were left with barren land and dry rivers" (110). The intrusive force of whiteness disturbs the cultural stability of the Native Indians. This leads them to cultural appropriation with the result of them living in two incompatible worlds. This self-hate which whiteness has implanted in the minds of the Indians is well captured when Tayo goes in search for the lost cattle of his uncle. His reaction on finding the cattle on white owned land is illuminating:

> If he had seen the cattle on land-grant land or in some Acoma's carrol, he wouldn't have hesitated to say "stolen". But something inside of him made him hesitate to say it now that the cattle were on a white man's ranch. […]. Why did he hesitate to accuse a white man of stealing but not a Mexican or Indian? (105)

Tayo, like the other Indians, has internalized the racist discourse of whites towards non-whites to the extent that it becomes difficult for him to call out the whites for the thieves that they are. His proceeding thoughts throw more light on this dynamic as expressed "He knew then he had learned by heart the lie which they wanted him to learn: only brown-skinned people were thieves; white people didn't steal, because they always had the money to buy whatever they wanted". (105)

The glorification of whiteness which goes hand in hand with the denigration of non-whiteness has created such a situation where the Indians now perceive themselves through the biased racist lens of whites. White wealth is also an aspect of hegemony because it gives them the power of acquisition. These are different aspects of white hegemony which create a racist matrix. Caught in this racist matrix, the Indians consider their marginalization at different levels as normal and indeed participate in uplifting whiteness. This denigrates every aspect of Indian life and creates in them the adverse desire to be accepted and absorbed into the white world. This explains why, when the rejection they had experienced prior to the war resurfaces after the war, they attempt to dispel their feelings of disillusionment by creating a make-belief world through excessive drinking and merry-making.

Cultural duality and Native American contradictory identities

This paper draws its title from Larry McMurty's introduction to *Ceremony* where he underlines that most of Silko's works "could be said to explore those borderlands of

the identity experienced by mixed-blood people – individuals who, in a sense, find themselves stuck between cultures, neither wholly in nor wholly out of what may be their native society". This situation is what I describe as the restlessness that accompanies the contradictory identities of the Native Americans. Contradictory because their indigenous culture which serves as source of a main facet of their identity stands in opposition to the colonizing white culture yet they have been brought to take on aspects of this culture which is not only alien but alienating. It is equally troubling that the cultural racism of the whites is responsible for the denigration and displacement of indigenous identity, yet the indigenes are made to bear aspects of their colonizer's cultural identity which fails to consider or recognise the full personhood of the Native Americans. It is from this unseemly condition of embodying two conflictual cultural identities that ensues this restlessness.

Besides, the trope of mix-bloodedness underscores Tayo's cultural melange. I read this as a metaphor for the cultural in-betweenness which Tayo exemplifies. When Auntie says of Tayo that "He's not full-blooded anyway" (25), it emphasizes his unbelonging or his incomplete belonging to the Native American culture and consequently foregrounds his sense of restlessness. This inhibits Tayo's total allegiance to his indigenous culture and compounds his feelings of outsidedness. Unfortunately, this alienation is at both the front of his indigenous culture as well as the invading white culture. His cultural duality places him in a cultural-no-man's-land and accentuates his cultural and identity trauma of being neither here nor there. The search for healing of Tayo foregrounds the tension between the "white doctors" and the "medicine men" with the two representing the two contradictory worlds of the text. This tension foreshadows the cultural encounter and clash which in turn produces cultural duality. This cultural duality ties in with the theory of cultural duality developed by Leon Chestang in 1976 but extended by Dubois and Miley (2013) who define it as "living in two worlds – the white dominant world and the black immediate culture" (86). Even though both Chestang's initial studies and that of Dubois and Miley focused on the cultural interactions between the dominant white and subjugated black cultures in America, we find the same forces at work in the Native American encounter and experience with white culture. This cultural duality of the Native Americans is well elucidated as follows: "But the fifth world had become entangled with European names: the names of rivers, the hills, the names of animals and plants – all of creation suddenly had two names: an Indian name and a white name" (50). This indicates how enmeshed the Native Indian world had become with the white world.

This intricate intermingling of cultures has been well conceptualized by Anzaldua (1987) who underscores that a new space is born of this meeting as elucidated below:

> The U.S -Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms, it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture. […]. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by an unnatural boundary. (2)

Even though Anzaldua here evokes a physical border in her comment here, it is the same dynamic which is at work in the cultural sphere. Tayo and the other Native Americans do not occupy physical borders but are culturally located at borders. They exist at a cultural crossroads and Anzaldua has equally elaborated on this aspect of borders in these terms "borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrink with intimacy" (2).

This is not a case of multiculturalism or mutual cultural exchanges, but rather a blatant situation of cultural imperialism. This has produced a world caught between two cultures and instilling restlessness in the characters who have to juggle multiple and conflictual identities. Tayo as mentioned above stands as the overriding metaphor of in-betweenness. His experiences stand as representative of those of Indians struggling to come to carve out an identity faced with the overwhelming force of whiteness. Tayo recounts his plight after the war as follows "They sent me to this place after the war. It was white. Everything in that place was white. Except for me. I was invisible. […]. Maybe I belong back in that place" (87). At the height of Tayo's trauma, he thinks that maybe he belongs in the white world. Yet, he seems blind to the fact that in that white world, he is "invisible". Invisibility is an important trope in African American literature in which blacks are rid of their personhood by the dominant racist white system to the point of not being considered as fully human – not recognized and not seen. Sellen (2009) underscores that "the metaphor of invisibility thus is a reminder of the long history of a thorough exclusion of blackness from culture, politics and social life" (11). This same metaphor is seen at play here as Native Americans because they too are victims of white racism. Tayo is drawn into a world that ironically only victimizes him by failing to consider him as fully human. At a closer look, this is an expression the cultural confusion he is experiencing having his feet in two worlds, both unable to fully accommodate him. This line of thought is pursued when Tayo notes thus: "He knew why he had felt weak and sick; he knew why he had lost the feeling Ts'eh had given him, and why he had doubted the ceremony: this was their place, and he was vulnerable" (159).

The reference to "their place" bespeaks unbelonging. Tayo is invisible in the white world and vulnerable in the indigenous world. He is therefore caught between the hegemonic white world and the victimized indigenous world: not fully belonging to

either. This situation is equally captured by Anzaldua whose condition of in-betweenness parallels that of Tayo:

> I am a border woman. I grew up between two cultures, the Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in our own territory). I have been straddling that *tejas* – Mexican border and others, all my life. It's not a comfortable territory to live in, this place of contradictions. Hatred, anger and exploitation are the prominent features of this landscape. (2)

This landscape of in-betweenness is a place of cultural and identity tumult. Tayo's inner conflict is born of this state of in-betweenness and worsened by the fact that he like the other Indians, realize that they had been co-opted into a war in which they had nothing to gain and everything to lose. The following dialogue between the war returnees is telling:

> "we fought their war for them"
> "yeah, that's right"
> "yeah, we did"
> "But they've got *everything.* And we don't get shit, do we huh?" (96).

It would appear that the Indians were tricked by a passing acceptance and recognition to participate in a war in which they had no direct stakes and which once ended, lost the fleeting privilege and even their rights to full citizenship. They returned from the war empty-handed or worse even full of trauma compounded by the realization that the losses and gory war experiences have done nothing to alleviate their position as underdogs in the society. Roemer (2005) in providing the timeline of Native American literature, justifies the inclusion of wars in these terms:

> Wars are listed, not only because Indian participation in the Revolutionary and 1812 wars was significant, but also because of the high enlistment rate among Native Americans in the twentieth century wars and the impact war experiences had on Indian communities. (25)

The war then appears as part of the white power apparatus that served to empower the white community while disempowering the Native American community. The Native Americans returned from the war embittered, psychically disintegrated and all of this is worsened by the realization that their participation all along was to serve not theirs but white interests. The status quo did not change in spite of their enormous sacrifices. This leaves them in even greater cultural confusion and consternation as to where they actually belong in the American society.

Conclusion

Silko's *Ceremony* highlights what happens when individuals are unable to locate a stable cultural home. The trauma that Native American characters experience, when closely

appraised, is not just the trauma of the war they took part in, but that of the internal war – the war of unbelonging – raging within them. This internal war is consequent upon their pained existence as outcasts within America. As indigenous people, they had to undergo the pain and indignity of witnessing their lands usurped and their cultures contaminated and dismembered by the invading whites. Their encounter with white hegemony has taught them to adopt the white racist posture towards themselves and culture while at the same time not being accepted into that world of whiteness. It is this discomfiting state of unbelonging that victimizes and ultimately traumatizes the Indians. Tayo, standing as metaphor for this in-betweenness is in a quest for a stable sense of selfhood. His ambivalence constitutes the confusion of individuals suffering from a split personality. Thus, it can be said that the narrative in *Ceremony* constitutes two ceremonies: one of self-disavowal for the Indians as a result of the violent cultural encounter with whiteness and the other; a ceremony of the search for a genuine self-born of the traumatic realization of unbelonging. This dual ceremony in a way connotes the cultural duality of the Native Americans once their cultures met with the hegemonic white culture. Thus, the trauma which undercuts the narrative is the trauma of a people caught between conflicting cultures.

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Abstract: Cultural displacement constitutes one of the main features of colonial encounters. This is due to the different control mechanisms employed by the forces of colonialism to subjugate

the dominated groups. This paper looks at one of the consequences of this cultural displacement which is the condition of in-betweenness in Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Ceremony*. The argument around which the discussions are built holds that the encounter between Native Americans and the colonizing whites, resulted in the cultural displacement of the Natives with different aspects of the white power structure serving to separate indigenes from their native culture. Drawing from cultural duality theory as propounded by Dubois and Miley (1992), Borderland theory of Anzaldua (1987) and aspects of Bhabha's (1994) cultural studies, this paper observes that whiteness acts as a force of cultural oppression in *Ceremony* which places the Native Indians in the discomfiting condition of in-betweenness, located as it were in a cultural-no-man's-land. This produces a sense of restlessness and ambivalence as the Indians become bearers of contradictory identities. From this perspective, in-betweenness is read as a location of trauma for the Native Indians who find themselves not fully belonging to the indigenous culture, they have been brainwashed to repudiate nor to the white culture which they are in the process of embracing.
Keywords: identity, cultural duality, white hegemony, in-betweenness, Native Americans

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Liminality and Beyond: Conceptions of In-betweenness in American Culture and Literature

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WHITE SAVIOR NARRATIVE VS. EMERGING IDENTITY IN AMERICAN SPORTS FILMS

Introduction

In May 2020 the United States and the world have yet again faced a dark face of the unsettled problem of systemic racism. The Black Lives Matter movement intensified its actions following the arrest and killing of Afro-American George Floyd by a white police officer. Monuments to racism and colonialism have been brought down throughout the country, violent protests and riots have flooded American streets and the debate whether people of color receive proper appreciation and respect has been sparked off. That, in turn, led to a thorough revision of films, novels and other cultural artefacts in order to establish their relevance in today's world and check if they are not racially biased.[1] The deliberations over Hollywood's contribution to the false and harmful depiction of the minorities' experience returns double-barreled. In this article I strive to contribute to the discussion on sports white savior narratives and the portrayal of emerging cultural identity as shown in sports dramas. By examining selected movies, I argue that sports dramas extensively use the tropes of white savior narratives and, thus, offer biased understanding of the ethnical minorities' experience and their identity formation process in the United States. An extensive body of literature exists to serve as a theoretical basis of the project. I will draw from the theoretical findings on cultural identity by Stuart Hall, Grant Jarvie's seeking identification and recognition through sport, and Matthew Hughey's writings on the white savior trope, among others. The corpus of material selected for analysis consists of three mainstream Hollywood productions of the last decade based on true events: Steven Hopkins's *Race* (2016), Niki Caro's *McFarland, USA* (2015), and John Lee Hancock's *The Blind Side* (2009).

On identity and sport

There has been numerous studies to investigate the concept of identity and its relation to sport. Stuart Hall argues that identity constantly operates "under erasure, in

1 E.g. HBO has recently decided to temporarily withdraw *Gone with the Wind* (1939) from one of its platforms, as it glorifies slavery.

the interval between reversal and emergence" (2). It is, hence, a task never accomplished, an ongoing process interwoven with a concept of identification, which Hall defines as a construct "on the back of recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation" (2). Sigmund Freud understands it as an expression of an emotional connection with another human (73). There is no totality and completion of that expression, though. Homi K. Bhabha goes a step further in examining social forms that emerge from the process of multicultural and post-colonial integration, such as hybridity, ambivalence and mimicry, the latter being the urge to imitate the dominant culture as emanation of "the colonist's desire for a reformed, recognizable Other" (186).

The concept of identity has long been central within sociological inquires into sport (Jarvie 15). It is often underlined that national, political or ethnical identity in sport may serve a number of purposes, such as facilitating social change, fighting unjust world order and regime, shaping role models for spectators and promoting values of fair play and sportsmanship among youth. Yet globalized, today's sport places the issue of identity central to those countries which, for example regained their independence and subjectivism (like the former USSR states) or are developing their position as serious players among superpowers in terms of their infrastructures, financial investments, sporting performances, etc. (South American states may serve as a suitable example.) Grant Jarvie, however, criticizes the term identity itself and considers it "plastic" and insufficient. He urges critics and researchers to acknowledge that "contemporary struggles for recognition in and through sport often take on the guise of particular forms of social identity. This is often aimed at championing the cause for a particular social difference or form of representation" (16). That recognition, in turn, may only be achieved through fair distribution of resources that would facilitate athletes worldwide equally.[2]

Is it not the craving for recognition that shapes these tense identity negotiations and constant state of inbetweenness in the worlds of the mainstream and the minorities? It is especially visible in the realm of sports and in the situation of the athletes of color pursuing their sporting careers in the western world. I find reasons for that scheme at least twofold. Firstly, sports and games exist only within the constraints of their rules, and these rules have been set and observed mostly by the mainstream. Interestingly, Justin Wolfers and Justin Price's research shows that during the 13 NBA seasons from 1991 to 2004, white referees tended to call fouls at a greater rate against black players than against white players and that the game outcomes are themselves the result of

2 Jarvie follows in Foucault's (2008) footsteps who argues that neoliberalism breaks down social relationships by forcing the human experience into an economic framework. The broader issues of class and capitalism replace discussions of systematic racism.

biased evaluation (2). Does that mean the ethnic majority are officially subjected to different, preferential and privileged treatment in the world of sports? Most certainly not, but it is probably not a coincidence that the infamous referee from New Jersey prevented an African-American teenager wrestler from taking part in a match unless he cut his dreadlocks (*The Guardian* 2019). In addition, the very act of performing in professional sports is inseparably linked with a state of continuous transformation. Competing athletes naturally undergo various personal struggles related to the challenges and stress they face. Additionally, being part of a high-performance team may provoke conflicts, tensions and personal grudges. The need for recognition, appreciation and validating one's identity and state of belonging becomes especially delicate, yet critical in such circumstances.

The white savior trope

The Hollywood industry has long ago discovered that feel-good stories of ethnic harmony and mutual friendship make successful blockbusters. Critics have observed a peculiar pattern in creating such stories and developing characters that would fit into the scheme of the so-called white savior narrative. The plot of the movie usually revolves around a white persona who bears responsibility for saving supporting characters (mostly black or Hispanic) from oppression and racial discrimination (Hughey 475). As Kerry B. Wilson observes, "[w]hite savior narratives centralize and normalize the white experience through the representation of people of color as unable to escape their social and cultural marginalization without the guidance and leadership of a single white actor" (24). The movies feature a group of nonwhites who struggle financially and socially, whereas it is the white protagonist who makes the effort and performs heroic sacrifices. Consequently, nonwhite characters are transformed, saved and redeemed (Hughey 475). It is, however, the protagonist's transformation that towers over the redeemed, hence the film's audience is not offered an elaborate picture of the perspective of the minorities' experience and their fluxing identities. Viewers are left with rather simplified answers to complex conundrums. Do nonwhite characters assimilate and achieve their goals? How does their mindset change? Are they even significant to this story?

Researchers and scholars have distinguished film plots and characters typical of the white savior mode. Roopali Mukherjee categorizes social problems as portrayed in cinema into (1) assimilation, (2) affirmative action and (3) nostalgia. The assimilation kind of productions follow an immigrant's struggle to achieve the American dream by thorough integration into American culture. Affirmative action movies problematize the "liberal intentions of the sixties and take contemporary anxieties over racial and

gender integration as their central problematic" (87), whereas nostalgia films critically review the racial and gendered transformation of the past by shifting the attention away from the minorities' experience to the salvation of the white protagonist. Mukherjee argues also that white savior narratives attempt at validating race-neutral meritocracy by diminishing the impact race has on the lives of people of color.

White saviors take various, yet predictable, forms and play conventional roles in the narratives they are vehicles of. They may be inspirational teachers in stories of lower-class, urban non-whites who struggle with the educational system. A white teacher makes the supreme sacrifice and undergoes a demanding transformation themselves to save their students and indirectly offer them a better future (Hughey 475). Hernan Vera and Andrew Gordon (18), on the other hand, notice cinematic white saviors as men of principle who come to black people's defense in the light of racist oppression, usually in the American South. Characters of color are relegated to the story's background; they become passive and helpless observers of their savior's bold actions. The abovementioned protagonists, which comes as no surprise, are mostly men, yet female characters have also carved their path in this convention. It suffices to mention one of the most widely discussed and acclaimed white savior blockbusters in recent years, Tate Taylor's *The Help* (2011). The exemplary list of Hollywood productions of strong white savior orientation may include, but is most certainly not limited to: *Blood Diamond* (2006), *Dances with Wolves* (1990), *Django Unchained* (2012), *Gran Torino* (2009), the *Matrix* trilogy, *The Last Samurai* (2003), *The Legend of Tarzan* (2016), *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984), *Avatar* (2009), *Green Book* (2018), and many more. It is noticeable that sports movies have become a breeding ground for white savior narratives, for which I find several reasons. They show the shaming face of high exclusivity of American sport on both amateur and professional levels, though it prides on being democratic (Johnson 20), inclusive and open for everyone regardless of their economic status or ethnicity. A white savior fable easily fits the scheme of the oppressed, aspiring athletes and the redeemer in the shape of a compassionate and noble coach, who frequently plays a didactic, fatherly role. What is more, sport films every now and then exploit the motif of people of color trying to prove their value to the society through their hard work and athletic excellence. Physical struggle is metaphorical for social struggle; defeat in competition represents life failures, whereas sporting victory stands for climbing the social ladder and overcoming personal demons.

"You belong to me" – Jesse Owens and Lawrence Snyder in *Race*

Steven Hopkins' 2016 sports biopic *Race* tells a story of an African-American athlete, Jesse Owens – a prominent figure of light athletics who won four gold medals at the

shrouded in controversy 1936 Berlin Olympic Games. It was on the eve of the II Word War that Owens made history excelling on the sporting arena, but also contributing to the civil rights movement struggle in the light of segregation in American higher education, the unease of global politics of the 1930s and the Nazi oppression in Germany. Though Owens' story is a matrix of complex and sensitive relations between the sporting and sociopolitical realms, Hopkins seems to put his emphasis elsewhere. He clearly sketches the portrait of Owens' contemporaries, but the movie focuses rather on the relationship he had with his coach Lawrence Snyder. A track and field athlete himself, Snyder served as a coach at Ohio State University from 1932 to 1965, met Owens there and contributed to his remarkable success. In the movie Snyder is portrayed by Jason Sudeikis; though it is supposed to be a supporting role, his story more often than not comes to the fore. Hopkins' Snyder comes across as a likeable, yet coarse, figure. He prides on being highly professional and demanding, constantly in search of young talents. When meeting Owens for the first time, he treats him in a patronizing manner, instantly spotting the young athlete's inexperience and gaucheness. Snyder undoubtedly plays a role of a charismatic and opinionated leader, who romanticizes his own athletic success and finds it difficult to face the fact that his records may be beaten. His dedication to work and his Jesse's prospective success dominate his life and overshadows personal problems; it is clearly indicated the coach has a drinking problem and a failed marriage to his name. Sudeikis skillfully shows Snyder's two-faced attitude: on one hand, he is a caring, just and devoted mentor who would do anything to support his mentoree. On the other, in a moment of strong emotional disturbance he shouts to Owens: "You belong to me!", objectifying him and re-centering attention on his own experience. A crucial scene takes place when Owens confronts him about his doubts whether to boycott the Nazi Olympic. The *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People* representative has visited his family and persuaded him to do so.

> "Snyder erupts telling Owens—'I don't care about any of that.' The quote lays it all on the line breaking down the uneasy comparison and contrast between the two main characters. The quote also dangerously nudges at post-racial fraudulent colorblindness that might resonate with a 21st century audience. Snyder does not have to care about Owens' race or him being a "Race Man" in 1930s segregated America—it is his privilege to be colorblind" (Schlabach 2016).

As a noble and wise mentor, though, Snyder develops as a person, accepts his past failures and moves on, forming a friendly bond with Owens. He becomes a fatherly figure for him (the athlete's real father is a rather insignificant persona in the movie's plot); it is clear that Owens owes him his career and success, and would never accomplish anything on his own. Whereas it is true for most prominent athletes that it is the team of coaches and assistants who work for one individual success, Snyder takes most

of the credit. A question may arise whether the athlete himself undergoes a change, acquires a new identity, grows to be an independent, self-conscious individual. As an athlete and a forerunner of people of color in professional sport – undoubtedly. But as a person and an American? The movie's finale gives a telling answer to that dilemma. Owens and his wife arrive at the gala which is held to honor his achievements, yet need to enter the building through the back door, as Afro-Americans are not allowed to use the front entrance.

"I'm guessing running's the best thing you got" – Jim White in *McFarland*, USA

Whereas one could probably wonder who is the real protagonist of *The Race*, Niki Caro's *McFarland, USA* leaves little doubt. The 2015 sports drama is based on a true story of coach Jim White (no pun intended) and a Latino high school cross country team from McFarland, California. In 1987, White took under his wings a group of seven Mexican-American boys from poor families leading them to winning state championships. Caro's White fits the savior profile most closely. Not free from flaws, White lost his previous job accidentally injuring one of his players and moves to provincial MacFarland. Struggling to adapt to the new place, he discovers athletic potential in a septet of Hispanic students and embarks upon an ups and downs journey for victory with them. The obstacles on their way are pretty cliché: the boys need to support their families; they have neither motivation nor money to go to college, let alone time for athletic practice and resources for running shoes and uniforms. White inspires self-agency in them and, along the way, undergoes a transformation himself. As Robert C. Bulman notices, "he gains respect for the culture and work ethic of the boys. The white hero is personally transformed as he comes to appreciate the humility, tenacity, and integrity of the residents of McFarland" (2015).

In spite of this appreciation to the team and their community, the film does not offer proper character building to the boys. Only three of them get any personalities and not very flattering ones: the overweight runner that nobody, except coach White, believes in, a reformed womanizer and the coach's favorite. Caro would rather sketch a portrait of the community as a whole; she depicts loving, hard-working minority families facing prejudice and financial obstacles. The film puts coach White in a position of a leader who gives them a chance for a seemingly better life.

The movie's final scene shows that White did, in fact, manage to provide that. Real life characters run in slow motion and the captions inform the audience who they have become and what they have accomplished. It is highlighted how valued members of their community they are, what education they have received. They started their own

families and some of them still reside in McFarland. Among them, there is Jim White riding a bike, as he used to when they were practicing together: a familiar, proud and friendly leader who empowered them to leave the lot of misfits behind.

"You're changing that boy's life" – Michael Oher and Leigh Anne Touhy in *The Blind Side*

Critically acclaimed John Lee Hancock's *The Blind Side* has been widely discussed not only due to its story being based on the NFL's offensive tackle, Michael Oher, but also due to its very strong inclination toward the white savior pattern. The storyline features Oher, a teenage orphan from the impoverished areas of Memphis, Tennessee, who has been adopted by a wealthy white Touhy family, which enables him to pursue a career in sport. Since Michael's mother abandoned him, he is homeless and struggles at school. Leigh Anne Toughy instantly spots him and, in one of the scenes depicting the emergence of their bond, literally saves him as her family drive by and notice that he is wearing just a t-shirt in cold and rainy weather. He has no place to stay, so they take him home and that becomes a permanent solution.

As Erin Ash observes, this is just one of the instances when the movie alters the story for its screen adaptation. Michael Oher, "Big Mike", as the community calls him, had been, in fact, taken care of by a number of people, before Leigh Anne and his husband Sean became his legal guardians. The cinematographic version of real events would undoubtedly always be fictionalized and modified, yet Hancock's choices juxtapose the false image of other adults being neglectful of Michael (94). The same pattern is followed regarding the young player's athletic abilities. "Tuohy's liberation and protection of Oher from the black culture are not limited to sheltering him […] The most striking modification of Oher's story, and one that manifests as a main story line of the film, is that Oher needed to be taught how to play football" (94). At first, Michael is portrayed in practice as helpless and confused. In one of the scenes, Leigh Anne interrupts the practice and coaches Michael telling him he needs to associate the game with the will to protect his family. The audience is left with no doubt that she is a sole and direct agent of his later success and that she is the one who gave him the sense of emotional belonging to her family.

Both Leigh Anne and Michael's characters are somewhat conspicuously shaped. She is a former cheerleader married to a millionaire, a contemporary Southern belle holding a Republican worldview and "being a good Christian". Sandra Bullock (given the Academy Award for her performance) offers a lively, opinionated and high-maintenance, yet caring and always doing the right thing persona. Devoted as a mother and confident in this role, Leigh Anne instantly becomes a motherly figure for Michael.

As with most white savior narratives, she goes through a process (e.g. facing her white friends who suggest Michael might be dangerous for her teenage daughter Collins), which the film pervades and explores. Oher, on the other hand, is an introvert, and a traumatized teenager who has issues tackling peer group dynamics and underperforming school, who, by the end of the film, maintains a positive, close relationship only with his new family. Hancock does not highlight the transformation he has undergone, but recenters focus on Leigh Anne. "Am I a good person?" she asks her husband craving validation of her good deeds, as she develops her identity of a savior.

Conclusions

As has been demonstrated, the white savior trope finds a breeding ground in sports dramas. The theoretical framework provided gave an interdisciplinary outlook at findings regarding cultural identity, seeking recognition through sport and the notion of white savior narratives in cinema. The trope and its characteristics were identified in the titles selected for analysis. Minorities as portrayed in those productions, and ostensible protagonists who represent them, share a set of very similar traits: these are aspiring athletes whose sport career is uncertain due to poverty, social rejection and discrimination. Inspirational coaches, and in the case of *The Blind Side* a foster mother, rescue them from social oppression, enable them to pursue an athletic career and help them achieve considerable success. As has been shown, white savior narratives place focus on the mentor, highlighting personal transformation they undergo, rather than the mentoree, which changes the dynamics of their relationship and diminishes young athletes' experience. At the end of that journey the oppressed express profound gratitude and form an emotional bond with the saviors. The sporting terrain makes the savior almost as indispensable to the athletic performance as the champion. After all, the top is not such a lonely place for people of color; there is usually a savior to share that success with.

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Filmography

McFarland, USA. 2015. Dir Niki Caro
Race. 2016. Dir. Steven Hopkins
The Blind Side. 2009. Dir. John Lee Hancock.

Abstract: In this article I strive to contribute to the discussion on sports white savior narratives and the portrayal of emerging cultural identity as shown in sports dramas. By examining selected movies, I argue that sports dramas extensively use the tropes of white savior narratives and, thus, offer biased understanding of the ethnic minorities' experience and their identity formation process in the United States. An extensive body of literature exists to serve as a theoretical basis of the project. I will draw from the theoretical findings on cultural identity by Stuart Hall, Grant Jarvie's seeking identification and recognition through sport, and Matthew Hughey's writings on the white savior tropes, among others. The corpus of material selected for analysis consists of three mainstream Hollywood productions of the last decade based on true events: Steven Hopkins's *Race* (2016), Niki Caro's *McFarland, USA* (2015), and John Lee Hancock's *TheBlind Side* (2009).
Key words: white savior, sport films, ethnical minorities, identity

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Liminality and Beyond: Conceptions of In-betweenness in American Culture and Literature

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ITALIAN-AMERICAN SELFHOOD IN THE REALM OF CULTURAL INBETWEENNESS PORTRAYED IN *SOMETIMES I DREAM IN ITALIAN* BY NINA CIRESI

Process of Italian American identity formation

The formation of Italian American identity is an intricate cultural phenomenon. It is not just a solitary psychological process but it is entangled in the multifaceted collective experience. Italian Americans have been compelled to continually negotiate their individual relationship with either the mainstream American society or with the immediate Italian American community, or with their residual Italian past. In such a context of cultural inbetweenness,

> [i]n coexistence are both ascribed and acquired traits, conscious and unconscious elements, some deliberately chosen and others unaware; at times, this identity-making process can be intermittent. The main question in the debate on ethnicity is whether or not it is tied mainly to ancestry or whether it is largely a choice. Being of Italian heritage does not imply one's having introjected it as part of one's own identity. Ways of understanding and interpreting one's Italian Americanness are not only different from one individual to another, but even the pathway that leads to one's self-identification varies from one individual to another. For some, in fact, who have no connection to Italian heritage by birth, being Italian American can coincide with a chosen lifestyle, with a template to follow. (Serra 611)

Correspondingly, the novelist Nina Ciresi reconstructs the discrepant means, spaces, and results of Italian American pursuits towards the formation of individual identities. The formation of the characters' identities does not entail a one-dimensional referent in definition of their selfhood. Who they are is interchangeably negotiated over against southern Italian heritage, religiosity, and gender norms as well as American racial stratification, class bifurcation, and the American dream ideals.

American assimilationist pressures as the point of departure towards the redefinition of Italian identity

Certain experiences of Italian American characters accentuate the imperative nature of the American establishment that forces Italian immigrants to redefine their identity,

placing them in the weakening, if not devastating, condition of inbetweenness, which, additionally, the characters are more often than not unconscious of. In Italy and within the Italian neighborhood in America, Angel and Lina's father is known as Carlino Pasquale Lupo. At work, he is called Charlie or Cholly. The Mama, in turn, remembers the hardship of Italian immigrants' children who had to succumb to American assimilationist practices:

> Those were hard days—hard times! Right before we came over came the flu. It swept across the country and killed thousands of people. Children lost their parents, their grandparents. Imagine, they rounded those kids up and sent them on trains to all sorts of crazy places—Indiana, Nebraska, Wyoming. The kids, they had to work as slaves on farms—for Germans, no less. They had to speak English. They had to change their last names. They had to dye their hair blond. (72)

The father and the mother disapprove of the imposition of American names on Italian immigrants, but they have no other choice than to unwillingly adjust to the new American reality.

In contrast, their children, who overtly remind their parents, "This isn't Italy" (75), after all, undergo a more explicit inner conflict. On the one hand, they approach assimilation with no reservation. They are in favor of replacing their Italian names with the English names. Lina even hopes to become a movie star, something that she knows an American name can facilitate. Together with that, she would like to dye her hair blond. At home, she insists on speaking English and instructs her mother to use"artichokes" and "coriander" instead of "carciofi" and "callino." When the Mama sends the girls for some Italian products, they bring "A&P brand macaroni instead of di Cecco, and Sunbeam bread instead of the crusty loaves, wrapped in wax paper, from Manfredo's Bakery" (81). On the other hand, while Lina does not want to speak Italian at home, in the external reality she feels compelled to defend her Italian identity when reproached with anti-Italian slurs. For this reason, she values Italian class the most because the teacher translates non-Italian names into Italian ones. Moreover, under particularly intensive emotions, she speaks in Italian, so, instead of never, she says "Mai" (88). Psychologically, emotional expressions reveal and develop one's personality. Therefore, it can be deduced that Lina speaks Italian when she most spontaneously expresses her true self. In other words, now matter how hard she tries to emulate American patterns, deep inside she is still Italian. Lina's inconsistent approach to her Italian name and language reveals the conflicting existence in the realm of inbetweenness. When confined by Italian conservatism of her mother, she seeks escape from all what is Italian, but when humiliated by the outside world due to her Italian origins, she struggles for the assertion of her Italian identity.

Particularly Lina's intermittent attitude toward assimilation in America manifests Italian American concerns with language, which is another significant referent in Italian American search for identity. Quite often, a conviction regarding the progress "from provincial peasant to modern American" (Carnevale 89) entailed the refusal to speak Italian and the determination to acquire English. The southern Italian immigrants, specifically, "knew that their language reflected their lack of status and power not just in America as foreigners, but in Italy where southerners have always been seen as less than their northern counterparts" (Carnevale 93).

Racialization of Italian Americans

In *Sometimes I Dream in Italian*, another dimension of Italian American characters' experience of cultural inbetweenness is racial. The characters are placed in the realm of racial bifurcation within which they have to decide to identify with either the superior whites or inferior blacks. Fleeing from the marginalization and poverty they experienced in Italy, they obviously aspire to attain the status of the privileged group in America. Already as little girls, Angel and Lina decipher the advantage of being white, so, as mentioned earlier, they dream of blond hair. Lina even hopes to marry a Swede in order to lighten up her family line.

The system of education also facilitates racial mindset. At school, proportionally, two black children are admitted for every Italian, which gives sometimes three black girls and two white girls in one sport team. However, both groups struggle for the assertion of their superiority. Angel remembers the black girls reproaching the Italians with "shouting taunts that ended with the phrase white girl, which sounded like why girl, why girl" (165). Sometimes, upon being exposed to stereotypical and prejudicial thinking, they call Italian girls "Guinea girls" (170), and imply their father's connections with Mafia, which the latter reciprocate by referring to black girls as "Nigger girls" (172). In the canteen, food fights take place between the two racial groups, in which Italian girls make sure that their group is as big in number as that of black girls. Although smoking and doing drugs apparently unites them as a way of standing up to the school authorities, there is no real mutual, relation-building communication between them. These moments serve more to articulate their frustrations. However, there seems to be at times a sort of affinity between the black and Italian girls, who resent oppressive Southern whites and biased Christianity. Lina mentions the Ku Klux Klan, Angel notes the Baptist Church, Terry, a black girl, points to the preachers in pickup cars, and Felicia, also black, refers to cotton. Then, like in one voice, they bring up tobacco, the servile attitudes of some black people, who they refer to as Uncle Toms, the restaurants Sambo's, named after a mascot-like black cartoon character (177). At the same time,

different schoolmates mispronounce Lina's name or use dozens such as "I bet your mother's a nigger" (79) in humiliating her.

In the midst of all these racial codes of communication, the Italian girls feel compelled to define themselves in racial terms. At one point, Lina poignantly states, "I'm not white" (179). She probably does it under the pressure of black girls, who see her as white, although, deep inside, she dreams of emulating white movie stars. This evidences her continued confusion. Somehow, though the school endeavors to eliminate racism by forming multiracial classrooms, the children cannot help it. Their external reality, the mainstream American society, inculcates in them racial mindset too deeply to let the school erase it. The Italian parents, additionally, even seek to reduce an interaction between their children and black ones. Angel explains the reason for electing Latin at school in the following way, "Mama had made me sign up for it so I would have at least one class that wasn't completely full of black kids" (184). No wonder then that Lina, in-between these tensions, once seeks to belong to the white privileged group, another time she resists it.

In racial terms, the condition of the characters in Ciresi's novel reflects Italian Americans, whose experience of

> inbetweenness and the consequent effort to establish the border against the dark-skinned other required an intimate struggle, a context against the initial uncertainty over which side of the racial dichotomy the swarthy immigrants were on and against the facts of history and geography that inscribed this ambiguity on the urban landscape. (Gardaphé 6)

The sensitivity of Italian Americans regarding racial hierarchy turns out to be imported from Italy. In reality, already in the nineteenth century, northern Italians adopted European colonialist discourse in categorizing southern Italians as inferior. "The division between the north and south of Italy was often described in exotic or racial terms. […] The southerners were compared to Africans, the south to Africa " (Wong 21). In the mainstream northern Italian nationalist terms,

> the south represented an entity that was outside the scope of enlightened national unity. It represented a space that was at its best, mildly un-European, and at its most extreme, wholly African. The discussions of the anti-Europeanness of the Italian south provided the stereotypes, the vocabulary that would later pervade post-Unification struggles to incorporate an unruly and uncooperative south. (Wong 7)

At one instance, the character-narrator's reflections on race and femininity entail the reluctance of the Italian American neighborhood towards a black American woman researcher and towards the Italians of Sicilian origin. The reservation stems from racial prejudice that Italian Americans have encountered and assumed both in their homeland and in America. In America, they developed the notion of the Pockabookie Ladies, an equivalent of conservative Sicilian women, who carried in their purses varied trappings

perceived in northern Italy and America as signifiers of their backwardness and at the same time American dream aspirations. When Angel wonders about the content of their purses, Lina answers, "Rosary beads, […] House keys, but never car keys. Laminated holy cards. A list of the Sorrowful Mysteries.A key chain from the Statue of Liberty" (202). The women's conservativeness is discussed vis-à-vis Merlyn Monroe, an epitome of American beauty and success. In their conversations, analogously, Italian American women contrast American slimming diets with fattening Italian pastry. As a result, Italian Americans become convinced that the closer they imitate or maintain southern Italian traits, the "Pockabookie-ismo" (207), the more they adhere to the marginalized members of the American mainstream society, constituted primarily by black people. What the fictional characters experience reflects the following socially documented process:

> many Italians, particularly those from the Mezzogiorno, encountered powerful, pervasive, and often racialized discrimination and prejudice upon arrival in the United States. Thus, if *meridionali* emigrated from Italy in part to escape a racialized social system that relegated them to the bottom tier, they entered another social system in the United States fairly close to the bottom again. (Gugliemo 35)

No wonder then that Mama ascertains one day, "we're the only white people here" (204) and resents having their Italian names changed into those sounding like the "colored people's names" (76). Mama emphasizes the fact that Italians, like black people, are considered in America to be second-class citizens and that they are compelled to detach themselves from their identity. Paradoxically, her daughters perceive her as a backward woman, whom they know they resemble, no matter how they try not to. Angel observes,

> The very Italian-ness, the Pockabookie-nish of Mama—her need to shake the throw rugs out of the second-floor windows and her obsession with cleaning the lint out of the dryer—was exactly what drove Lina and me crazy, because we knew we had inherited some of it, and the whole thing made us feel nuts ourselves. (207)

On the whole, the characters' concerns with racial categorizations represent a form of resistance to derogatory stereotypes that Italian immigrants were ascribed to and that facilitated their marginalized social status. Historically,

> In 1911, the U.S. Immigration Bureau published their purportedly "objective and scientific" study, concluding that the "new" immigrants were harder to assimilate, prone to crime and disease, less literate, and were decidedly less desirable than northern Europeans. […] What the commission said about Italians served to reinforce and shape the contours and parameters of racial nativism by separating southern Italians from northern Europeans and linking them with perceived darker races. (Vellon 26-27)

With its focus on race, Ciresi's novel exemplifies "an emerging ethnic aesthetic […] with a powerful return to realism about the continuities of history, and to symbolism

in dealing with the complexity of individual experience" (Hendin 14). After all, race has been a determining factor regarding one's socio-political status in the external reality. Ciresi's characters, like actual Italian immigrants, live in the conspicuously racialized American communities. The novelist's focus on delineating their conflicting emotions relative to their selfhood reflects the intricacy of Italian American individual identity development.

Italian American femininity

The search for identity of the Italian American female adolescents portrayed in Ciresi's novel involves the need to possess role models that would epitomize integrated femininity. Above all, Angel and Lina's mother does not represent an authority to them due to her conservatism, which brings about "the lack of glamor in life" (127) and contempt towards the rich. Angel testifies, "The thought of becoming like Mama made me shiver" (142). She remembers the depressive solemnity of her mother's and other women's black dresses and golden crosses at her grandmother's funeral, the memory of which is juxtaposed with Mama's controlling upbringing practices, depriving the children of the sense of privacy. For instance, Mama tended to take the girls aback by sneaking upstairs and suddenly opening the door to their room to control their games. She never asked them about their desires and aspirations, and defied other family members' suggestions regarding the education of her children. When Auntie Pat discerned Lena's musical gift, Mama refused to send her for the piano lessons.

Lina's relationship with her mother deteriorates particularly when her mother slaps her face on finding out that her menstruation has started, indicating her greater vulnerability to moral depravation and sinfulness. Lina, in turn, instead of taking pride in growing into womanhood, temporarily withdraws in silence and anxiety. Obviously, her response is not evoked by an embracing consolation of her mother, a declared Christian.

Under the oppressiveness of Mama, thus, Lina and her sister reach for other female role models. Quite intriguing and inspiring for Lina is her aunt Pat. Although the aunt exhibits connectedness to Italian heritage, by, for example, reading *Il Progresso* magazine and coming to New York to see *La Traviata* or *La Boheme*, the value of which Lina at times is not certain of, Lina perceives her as a liberated and empowering woman. In order to escape the delimiting matriarchal household, Lina reads the biographies of famous women such as Marie Curie, Harriet Tubman, Florence Nightingale, Eleanor Roosevelt, Helen Heller, which she receives from Auntie Pat or from library, in hope of being able to follow the footsteps of the distinguished women.

Unfortunately, her unceasing condition of inbetweenness makes it challenging for her to define who she is as a woman and leads her to emotional instability. No matter

how hard she tries to flee from the confining conviction of femininity inculcated by her mother, she cannot help but feel inertly disintegrated. She confides she sometimes feels "like I'm two people in one" (133). Angel, at that point, as an observer and a more indirect victim of Mama's oppression, remains equally confused. She is troubled by hatred towards boys, by jealously of her more attractive sister, and by external expectations to take the sides either of Lina or Mama or her aunt. However, deep inside, she is aware of the necessity to define her own selfhood. Remembering her inner struggles, she notes, "I wanted to be on my own side" (161).

After many years, as a grown up woman, Angel comes to the realization that, since her childhood, she has never been permitted to express her individual viewpoint at home. Any opposition to her mother's will and opinion ended in punishment. Psychologically, she has not been granted any space for self-development. In result, she retreats to isolation, a state of consciousness that makes her believe that only God has remained to talk to. She has no more desire to share her thoughts and feelings with her mother. She recalls, "From that moment on, I resolved to keep everything hidden from Mama. She did not deserve my confidence" (232). Before, in her resistance, she put on a mask of an obedient daughter, who never stood up to Mama. Although she did it fully consciously, still playing the role had a psychologically confusing impact, because it prevented Angel to fully participate in her adult life, making independent decisions, and taking responsibility for them. Now, she feels she has a problem regarding even her femininity, the development of which she believes her mother hindered. Actually, she becomes aware she had to repress her womanhood, for which she has the courage to reproach her mother only when her mother is paralyzed in effect of stoke. She says,

> My crotch is on fire. I remember everything. You slapped my face so hard when I got my first period you almost gave me a black eye! The time you fitted me for my first bra, you pulled the tape measure so tight you practically strangled me! This is how I've turned out, Mama: I hate my job. I feel like some crazed bird cooped up all day in the office. But when I get home, I'm lonely. I shop too much. I overeat. I take a Sominex and go to sleep with the TV on. I screw guys I can't even stand! In the morning I look in the mirror and can't believe how old and ugly I'm getting. (266)

Angel comes to the realization that her mother's frigidity and disregard towards body has violated Angel's own sense of womanhood. It has a very devastating psychological effect on grown-up Angel, incapable of embracing her sexuality and engaging in a stable loving relationship. This, in turn, has an imprint on her low self-esteem, which inhibits her self-development even in such fundamental spheres of life as home and work. She also feels like a little girl when she is afraid to tell her father that she is leaving for holiday in Italy with her lover. The guilt complex affects her self-image, which

Dirk, the lover, makes her aware, inquiring "Why do you always define yourself in terms of your family" (341).

On the whole, Angel and Lina undergo inner conflicts in terms of their womanhood, upon being exposed to "differences between Italian and American culture, which included the priority of the family over all institutions and the individual, the matricentric family versus the patriarchal family, and a culture of interdependence versus independence" (Tardi 97).

Class and Italian American identity

Another facet of Italian American experience of inbetweenness is economic. Historically,

> After 1890, the majority of "new immigrants" left southern and eastern Europe (Italy, Russia, Balkans) for the United States. In previous decades, most immigrants to America had been northern and western Europeans from Scandinavia, Germany, and the British Isles. Most of the "new immigrants" were neither Protestant nor wealthy; they were poor and less educated than the "old immigrants" that preceded them. (Messina 43)

Therefore, when the poor Italians reached America, strong class stratification had permeated the country for almost three hundred years. White Anglo-Saxon Protestants constituted the dominant class. In the South, the hierarchy had been sectioned by the system of slavery. Although it had been officially abolished by the time Italian immigrants arrived, Jim Crow sustained it. In the North, capitalist industrialization facilitated conspicuous class division as well, placing the black migrants from the South and "new immigrants" from Europe at the bottom of the social ladder. In a class oriented American realm, the Italian immigrants struggled to maintain their selfhood between their working class status and the external pressures to profiteer. They endeavored to attain a respectful social position with particular eagerness because they had encountered class-discrimination already in their own homeland.

In Ciresi's novel, the consciousness of class bifurcation in Italy is exposed by the attention that the characters pay to their language. Babo speaks with a dialect of an Italian villager, so his wife and daughters compare him to a "paesano" (21, 83). In America, his daughters do not want to listen to the accent that intensifies their inferiority complex. However, occasionally, also in this respect, Italian Americans undergo the pressures of inbetweenness, as does the character Lina, who still exhibits latent desire to learn and identify with her Italian heritage, manifested, for example, in her curiosity concerning the meaning of the non-standard, which is most probably southern Italian, expression "Chesi dice" (206), since she hears people around her notoriously using it, without even knowing its real meaning. She is torn apart between American aspirations regarding

fixed beauty standards, speech patterns associated with economic success and her awareness of, and even temporary connectedness to, her Italian heritage.

Mundane life and attitude of Angel and Lina's mother also reflect an Italian-American economic dilemma. The "Mama" seems to seek to maintain her Italian identity. She actually makes herself believe she is entirely committed to all what is Italian. However, while she carefully chooses Italian expressiveness, her numerous behavioral patterns betray her entrapment in endeavor to realize the American ideal of prosperity, which generates the condition of inbetweenness she is not really aware of. Therefore, on the one hand, in order to express her loyalty to Italy, she buys only Italian cheese and does not want the Swiss one and "pay good money for holes" (10). She regularly serves tomato sauce and penne with Parmesan. Especially at the moments of emotional excitement, she inserts Italian sayings, for instance, "Tutti hanno i sogni" (68) (Everybody has dreams), "Perchè?" (Why) (68). Other times, her utterances manifest pidgin, as exemplified by "If you don't yell, he don't capisce" (97).Her purse and immediate surroundings are replete with Catholic trappings such as rosary beads, "laminated holy cards […] plastic figurine of an apostle, a virgin martyr, or some obscure saint" (68).Her religious practices mirror what in America is considered a typical Italian American style, consisting "of a strong devotion to the cult of saints, a deeply Marian" (D'Agostino 36). At this instance, Ciresi's novel inscribes itself within the canon of Italian American women writers, in whose works "Italian Catholic iconography pervades" (Bona 43) together with a critical commentary on it.

On the other hand, Mama avidly and regularly plays bingo, bets on lottery, and attends various contests in hope of accumulating a fortune. In the long run, her existence between two discrepant cultural contexts results in hybrid manifestations. On her refrigerator, she collects the magnets of the Pope John Paul II and of Pizza Hut, and all over the flat there are

> The pink porcelain baby shoe with the purple pincushion in the middle.
> The condiment dish shaped like a Venetian gondola.
> The plastic Pietà on top of the T V.
> The crucifix studded with seashells.
> The coconut with the painted face that says, Welcome to Miami Beach!
> The lamp that has a great horned owl on its base.
> The Last Supper plate with the heads of the apostles worn off! (212)

In her household, she ends up serving Easter ham, following an Italian custom, and Thanksgiving turkey, conforming to an American tradition. Therefore, the Mama represents a particular stage of Italian immigrants acculturation in America that involves "shame and doubt about their heritage and a vague desire for new goals in life, which most often results in attempts to assimilate by adopting respectable, middle class values

and downplaying their Italian roots" (Goeller 73-74), with one difference: she represses the shame and doubt.

The description of the gloomy landscape of the Lupo family neighborhood underlines the general living condition and inferior status of Italian Americans within the mainstream American society. Angel recalls, "We lived in New Haven, where the murky green harbor smelled like raw mussels, and the sky, above the giant oil tanks that squatted onshore, seemed perpetually gray" (70). Lina and Angel would have eagerly departed from the monotonous life wherein.

Their neighborhood's landscape is juxtaposed with an interesting referent in their negotiations of their Italian American selfhood, mainly the Statue of Liberty, a symbolic landmark. In general, immigrants were mesmerized by it while seeing it for the first time on the ships off shore. Mama reminiscences, "suddenly, out of the mist—yes, there was mist, and fog—we saw her, the Statue of Liberty, holding the torch. La Bellissima! my father called her. The most beautiful woman in the world" (122). However, Angel and her sister find it challenging to work out their consistent feelings in-between the family members' discrepant approaches to this symbol of liberty. Uncle Luigino, called in Italian Zio Gigi, is most attracted by it. He, acting as a man truly involved in politics and social advancement, and imbibed by American ideals of democracy and freedom, is ashamed of his Italian family background. The father, Babo, only selectively remembers the first impressions that the Statue of Liberty made on him and remains disappointed with New York and the quality of life he and his family have had since they moved in the country of supposed freedom. The mother, in turn, after a while, develops indifference towards it.

Initially, Angel and Lina, still little girls in hope of attaining the American Dream, side mostly with their uncle. At one point, Lena and the uncle find themselves in the dark corner, where the uncle takes down his pants. Suddenly, the idealized image of the uncle-the activist and dreamer fades, and the glorification of the Statue of Liberty ceases. When Lina shares the experience with her sister, only confusion and discomfort remain. The episode exposes the fragility, inauthenticity, and moral destructiveness of the American Dream, which forces individual immigrants of low self-esteem, such as uncle Gigi, to take up the roles of its propagators, in illusory conviction that they pursue it successfully.

Emotional disintegration as a trope manifesting Italian American identity crisis

The outcome of the two Italian girls' attempts to embrace their selfhoods is dramatic. In their adult lives, they are still tormented by inhibiting internal conflicts.

Angels becomes conscious of her emotional devastation. Her dietary habits deteriorate. Not aspiring anymore to attain the look of Hollywood stars, she perceives herself as "turning into a junk-food pig," (270) which, she suspects, is a sort of lamentation coming "from the same vast and lonely cave within" (270) herself. Out of lonely desperation, she even places an advertisement in a matchmaking column, although she is convinced of its degrading effect on the image of women, whose bodies are more regarded than intellect. The outcome is a distorted relationship with Dirk, a German American intellectual, specializing in Teutonic literature and Goethe, fond of Italian cuisine. Upon his continued stereotyping and categorizing her, by way of, for instance, perceiving her reactions and speech as signifiers of "Mediterranean blood" (289), she feels "like some tropical agricultural product" (291). Suddenly, her past complexions relative to the associations of Italians with peasantry and the propagated belief in the inferiority of *contadini* or *paesani* are reenacted. When Angel and Dirk are in Italy, for a while Angel feels truly at home. However, it is partly Dirk's presence that hinders her sense of belonging to the land of her ancestors and again reactivates her inferiority complex due to her southern Italian descent. In Italy, she becomes more sensitive to the bifurcation between the south and north, perceiving Italian reality through American prisms. She discerns the enviable similarity between the girls in Florence and her sister Lina in terms of elegance and style. In the long run, she ceases to feel at ease in Italy upon coming to realize that even her Italian is far from that of natives, who, for example, do not even use the idioms that she had to learn by heart at American school. By and large, even in Italy she discovers the delimiting nature of her struggle to embrace Italian and American realms that imbued her consciousness so profoundly that she is not able to identify entirely and consistently with either of them.

In America, in turn, Angel cannot fit in the capitalist framework. At the same time, no matter how detached she wants to be from her family that she considers parochial, she cannot uproot herself. She muses,

> Even though I hadn't lived in my parents' house for years, I still carried the key with me every day. It was attached to a silver key tag that depicted the Vatican. The inscription said La Città Eterna. The key ring sat at the bottom of my purse, along with all the rest of the junk I needlessly toted around. (234)

Eventually, Angel reveals, "Sometimes I dream in Italian. I'm talking but I don't have the least idea what I mean to say" (323). This epigraphic statement has a bearing on Angel's lack of self-integrity. Still in search of her selfhood, she cannot define the meaning of her life and cannot name and express her latent, true needs.

Although Lina's success is only financial, Angel finds her life enviable. Lina presumably has an exciting adult life, as she can afford face-lifting surgery, luxurious cars, impressive mansion, and fashionable clothes. Convinced of having attained the

American dream, she acts as an aloof assimilationist. However, certain forms of behavior and expressivity uncover her more unconscious than conscious attachment to Italy. She works at a Venetian Palazzo. She asks Angel to bring some typical Italian souvenirs from Italy. She wishes her sister "Buon Viaggio."In the midst of this, suddenly, she attempts suicide - most poignant evidence of her unresolved inner conflict caused by the irreconcilable American and Italian ideals.

Actually, the whole family disintegrates emotionally. Mama, before she passes away, suffers from paralyzing stroke. Babo submerges himself in mundane life within his decaying household and refuses any assistance from outside. He does not want to hire a cleaning woman and the lawyers. He also turns into a racist, manifesting his anti-Japanese, anti-black, and anti-Latino prejudices. He remembers, again, the circumstances of his arrival to the United States, when he felt like nobody.

> It was raining cats and dogs when the boat got to New York. We stood in line for six hours with nothing to eat or drink! When we finally got to the desk the immigration officers spelled our name wrong! We were too scared to correct them! We weren't proud in those days! We lived twelve people in a three-room apartment above a bakery! We ate day-old bread and were thankful for every crumb we could get! (243)

After many years of living at the margins, he becomes desperate and hostile to the American external reality. He even begins to speak Italian at home again. Young women like Angel and Lina cannot stand "the torture of hearing this family saga" (244), and they are incapable of forming a healthy relationship with their father resigned into bitterness.

Conclusions

The existence between two discrepant cultural realms causes the unceasing sense of instability. The plights of Ciresi's main female characters, Lina and Angel, exhibit the condition noted by Fred Gardaphé:

> Reinforcement of a positive cultural identity that was created in the home is necessary for the maintenance of and a willingness to continue that identification outside the home. If children get the idea that to be Italian is to be what the media and white histories say Italian is, then they will either avoid it, if it shames them, or embrace it if it gets them attention. (7)

Out of the shame of Italian heritage inculcated by the mainstream American external realm grew Italian American anxiety, resulting in personal and inter-personal disintegration. Additionally, the parents, entrapped in economic struggles and unable to reconcile their Italian value system with American aspirations, do not offer a firm foundation for their children's self-development.

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Abstract: In the novel *Sometimes I Dream in Italian*, Nina Ciresi envisions the complexity of Italian American selfhood through the reconstruction of the experiences of post-WW II Italian immigrants in the United States and of the generation that followed. The account of the character-narrator, Angel Lupo, a woman in her thirties, constitutes a patchwork of storylines that present primarily her plight as well as that of her parents and of her elder sister, Lina. The identity crisis accompanied by the sense of hopelessness, self-disintegration, and emotional

vacuum that both sisters undergo in their adult lives stems from their attempt to reconcile their Italian cultural background with American ideals. Through multiple flashbacks, Angel exposes the internal conflicts engendered by the existence between anxiety-based Catholicism and American Dream aspirations. The characters' unending struggles for recognition attain multifaceted nature as they entail their attempts to define themselves and estimate their status in religious, familial, racial, and economic realms. These realms are accentuated by the Italian immigrant women's conservative religiosity, the circumstances of Italian migration from Europe to America, socio-economic marginalization of Italian Americans reflected by Italian American neighborhoods, fixed gender roles, the inferiority complex of southern Italians over against northern Italians and its transmission to the American context, the overwhelming pressures of economic advancement, American ideals of beauty and success, racial discrimination of Italians Americans, the inter-racial conflicts between Italian Americans and Black Americans.
Keywords: Italian-Americans, inbetweenness, American Dream, heritage, identity

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Liminality and Beyond: Conceptions of In-betweenness in American Culture and Literature

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LIMINAL SPACES AND IDENTITIES IN ELIZABETH BISHOP'S POETRY

American culture is perhaps the most visibly and ostensibly on the move in terms of ongoing linguistic, spatial, and identity negotiations between (and among) minorities and the mainstream. While current categories of identities, place, and space already have their established literary readings through the optics of liminality and hybridity, especially in the context of ethnic or postcolonial literatures, concerns over borders and their both porous and potentially transformative nature are equally present in the writing of acclaimed mainstream American writers whose work was upheld as objectively representing the experience of American majority, as shall be demonstrated on the landscape poetry of Elizabeth Bishop (1911–1979), which was critically celebrated for its impersonal expression and conservative form.

The distanced effect of her production was largely promoted by Bishop herself, as she was known to discourage any critical attention towards her private life and distanced herself from the Women Movement. Victoria Harrison reads Bishop's poetry as a representation of conflicting urges between privacy and "intimate self-exposure" (67). Moreover, Bishop's life was geographically rich: after she lost her father, she spent her childhood with her grandparents from her mother's side in Great Village, Nova Scotia. The sense of alienation caused both by the dislocation and her troubled relationship with her mother is reflected in her autobiographical short story "In the Village" (1953). When Bishop was six, she was taken from Nova Scotia by her father's upper-class parents to Worcester, Massachusetts. She did not adapt well to the change and soon felt isolated and looked down upon, as she documents in another of her autobiographical short story "Country Mouse" (published posthumously in *Collected Prose*). Later Bishop moved to Brazil and after the death of her partner, returned to the United States. Her life is thus marked by a sense of exile and shifting landscapes, placing her into a long-term liminal position.

The indeterminacy and liminal aspects of reality, geography, and identity are distinctly manifested in Bishop's concept of place. She addresses her own life-long liminal negotiations between an outsider (or a tourist), and a local by placing her characters

into landscapes which are not only geographical but, more importantly, psychological, and spiritual. Many of her poems are set on an island, at the confluence of two rivers, or at a coastline, highlighting the liminal aspect of both the landscape and her speakers. The omnipresent, continual and essential fluidity is, however, not perceived as dangerous or harmful, but rather, as a creative sign of life.

In her poem "Santarém," Bishop treats space, identities, and borders as analogical concepts. The text depicts a sightseeing cruise to the confluence of Amazon and Tapajós, where these powerful rivers flow alongside and then come together, in the ever-present moment of transition, forming a space that is in continuous making. The liminal state does not concern only the landscape but also the speaker of the poem who is visiting the place as a tourist, which itself can be considered a liminal state. According to Dean MacCannell: "Sightseeing is one of the most individualized, intimate, and effective ways we attempt to grasp and make sense of the world and our place in it. Sightseeing is psyche" (6). The journey the individual undertakes, or the protagonist's quest, frees him from the everyday life and provides new landscapes, changes the social order and rules, and as such is potentially liberating and transformative, as due to separation from home and community, the place provokes the speaker to re-interpret and re-contextualize what is seen and experienced:

> I really wanted to go no farther;
> more than anything else I wanted to stay awhile
> in that conflux of two great rivers (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 185)

What Bishop evokes is not a moment of two rivers becoming one but of rivers coming together in a "conflux," flowing alongside, both keeping their beauty and significance. Bret Millier claims that this poem "escapes its author's commitment to accuracy and takes on an air of myth" (308). Yet Millier does not consider the concepts of liminality and indeterminacy of either space or identity, correlating fixed states with accuracy. Bishop's depiction of landscape is geographically and perhaps ethnographically accurate, while at the same time expressing the speaker's perception and cultural perspective.

The representation of liminal spatial quality in "Santarém" offers an image of a place that is constantly reinventing itself but at the same time, turns out to be a great source of freedom from fixed notions, stereotypes or ideologies:

> I liked the place; I liked the idea of the place.
> Two rivers. Hadn't two rivers sprung
> from the Garden of Eden?
> No, that was four, and they'd diverged.
> Here only two and coming together (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 185)

The view of two rivers becoming one is not presented purely as a sight of natural beauty but Bishop upholds its symbolical value by highlighting the "idea of the place." According to Löfgren, we shall "view vacationing as a cultural laboratory where people have been able to experiment with new aspects of identities, their social relations or their interactions with nature and also to use the important cultural skills of daydreaming and mind-travelling. Here is an arena in which fantasy has become an important social practice" (7). The representation and reading of the landscape are therefore significantly affected by the expectations and preknowledge of the seer. As Urry claims, "the tourist gaze is directed to features of landscape and townscape which separate them off everyday experience. Such aspects are viewed because they are taken to be in some sense out of the ordinary. . . with much greater sensitivity to visual elements" (3). The instability of the water mass and overwhelming view challenge the speaker to defy the structure and format of grand narratives. The speaker realizes the necessity to refuse biblical implications and replace them with insight that Emerson called for: "Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition and a religion by revelation to us?" (xi). The fluid space encourages critical thinking and provokes resistance to mainstream discourse:

> Even if one were tempted
> To literary interpretations
> Such as: life/death, right/wrong, male/female
> – such notions would have resolved, dissolved, straight off
> in that watery, dazzling dialectic (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 185)

In her portrayal of the Brazilian landscape, Bishop refuses duality based on opposites, as she considers them as imposing restrictions on her identity, experience, and more generally: nature and art. Instead, she evokes a sight that is absorbing and compelling, as well as interpretative. It is not only a coming together of water masses but also of cultures, beaming with houses, people, riverboats, and "everything bright, cheerful, casual – or so it looked" (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 186). She creates an image of conflux of nature and culture that is constantly on the move: "people / all apparently changing their minds, embarking, / disembarking" (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 186) and even the people are of mixed, or rather hybrid origins:

> After the Civil War some Southern families
> came here; here they could still own slaves.
> They left occasional blue eyes, English names,
> and -oars- (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 186)

Their slave-holding legacy was dissolved as any other polarities that Bishop suggested above. The natural site and its idea provide a space for alternative understanding and

reading of the world. As Janet Atwill claims, such approach, this *techné* "deforms the limits into new paths in order to reach – or better yet, to produce – an alternative destination" (48). Such knowledge, as Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant observe, is "a type of intelligence and of thought, a way of knowing" that comes to life in "situations which are transient, shifting, disconcerting, and ambiguous . . . that do not lend themselves to precise measurement, exact calculation or rigorous logic" (3-4). Only by casting aside previous patterns of thought and habit, or the grand narratives (be it religion, culture, or science), can the irreducible complexity of reality and its constant fluidity be accepted: "Santarém *happened*, just like that, a real evening & a real place" (Bishop, *One Art*, 621). Bishop therefore reads reality as constantly liminal and considers such state natural.

The optics of liminality and the new *techné* enable the speaker to find beauty and freedom in places that others do not find appealing, or which remain invisible to them. As Emerson believed: "The eye is the best of artists. . . There is no object so foul that intense light will not make beautiful. And the stimulus it affords to the sense" (13). Bishop's speaker indeed shares Emerson's vision of the beauty in world, being the seer he called for. She is able to find true beauty in an empty wasp's nest that she admired so much, a local pharmacist gave it to her. Liminal spaces reflect Turner's claim that the transitory experiences are liberated "from structural obligations proper of the social order, where people 'played' with the elements of the familiar and 'defamiliarized' them. 'Novelty emerges from unprecedented combinations of familiar elements'" ("Liminal to Liminoid", 59). Her ability to find beauty even in common, though defamiliarized objects (especially one that would be considered useless and formerly dangerous rather than associated with beauty) is frowned upon by her fellow passenger Mr. Swan: "Dutch, the retiring head of Philips Electric / really a very nice old man," who asked, "'What's that ugly thing?'" (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 187). His preconceived notions and purpose of his trip did not allow him to alter his view of the world. For him, the journey and liminality did not turn out to be liberating but rather frustrating. Despite their disagreement, the speaker still views him as "a very nice old man," confirming the claims of Jaimangal-Jones et al. that "rites of passage 'transition' phase could be applied to both travelling to events and to the actual events themselves, as in both these contexts normal social roles are suspended, communitas are developed and experienced and spiritual experiences can be gained" (262). As travelling leaves social order and norms behind, new experiences create space for new "communitas" or bonds that would not be formed under everyday circumstances.

The liminal position of a tourist is once more discussed in a poem "Questions of Travel," though this time without the hint to fellow tourists. The landscape that is

introduced is depicted as almost unpleasantly brimming with movement and fluidity that is impossible to capture:

> There are too many waterfalls here; the crowded streams
> hurry too rapidly down to the sea,
> and the pressure of so many clouds on the mountaintops
> makes them spill over the sides in soft slow-motion,
> turning to waterfalls under our very eyes (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 93)

Jeffrey Grey observes how this abundancy "alienates and nauseates more than it excites" (41); the landscape and the tourist position did not match the state of mind of the speaker who interprets the sight and appropriates it by projecting her own mental struggle into it, depicting the water as "tearstains," or perhaps referring to the struggle of the Amazonian region; the fast movement and the abundancy is so complex to absorb that the scene must be translated into known and smaller objects, such as "capsized ships":

> But if the streams and clouds keep travelling, travelling,
> the mountains look like the hulls of capsized ships,
> slime-hung and barnacled (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 93)

After creating a mental connection to something graspable and familiar, the speaker then raises a series of questions, contemplating the potential benefits or losses of staying at home and voices the sense of "the awkwardness derived from the capacity for travel – the awkwardness of being outside, anthropologically, as it were, looking in" (Grey, 41). The speaker here adopts the collective identity of a tourist, of the "we" who questions the benefits as well as the right to travel that suddenly feels like an intrusion into somebody else's life:

> Think of the long trip home.
> Should we have stayed at home and thought of here?
> Where should we be today?
> Is it right to be watching strangers in a play
> in this strangest of theatres? (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 93)

The speaker questions the necessity of travel, its ethical aspects, including the capacity to absorb so many new landscapes and sensations, summing up arguments for staying at home and imagine the other spaces and cultures. Still, the complexity and perhaps mental chaos such liminal experience can cause, offer multiple creative possibilities. As Turner believes: "Liminality can perhaps be described as a fructile chaos, a storehouse of possibilities, not a random assemblage but a striving after new forms and structures, a gestation process, a fetation of modes appropriate to postliminal existence" ("Dewey, Dilthey", 42). After the speaker appropriates and domesticates the scene and its implications, she provides an alternative to imaginative travel, providing a list of experiences one would have missed and lost: "the trees along this road, really

exaggerated in their beauty," "Wooden tune of disparate wooden clogs," "the other, less primitive music of the fat brown bird," "rain," or the "golden silence" (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 94). While arguing for the joys of travelling, the speaker mentions common objects and sounds (or lack of) that highlight the focused eye of the tourist who is taken out of his known surroundings that often makes him not see or hear the world around him, hinting on Emerson's claim that "few adult persons can see nature" (7).

By providing a more distanced, external perspective, travel therefore serves as a means of renewal of the Emersonian insight, enabling the speaker to admire the imperfect craftsmanship of clogs, the beauty of a bird cage resembling "a bamboo church of Jesuit baroque" (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 94). Moreover, the commonality of the depicted imagery leads to the concluding line: "Should we have stayed at home, wherever that may be?" (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 93). Complicating not only the keen tourist gaze that is actively absorbing details of the new scenery but also the concept of home, the stable familiar center. The intent gaze of the tourist is defamiliarizing, yet at the same time, provides a deeper insight into the world, blurring the boundaries of here and there, home and abroad, tourist and local. The effect of such boundary blurring is manifested in her poem "The Sandpiper."

Here Bishop uses the shoreline as her setting, the place that is unstable yet rich and habitable. This time, offering a closer, more detailed look, as she portrays the landscape from the perspective of a bird who is at home in the place, yet interpreting his behavior and world around him:

> The roaring alongside he takes for granted,
> and that every so often the world is bound to shake.
> He runs, he runs to the south, finical, awkward,
> in a state of controlled panic, a student of Blake (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 131)

It is again the speaker, who reads the landscape and the bird's way of life through the concepts of culture by suggesting, the sandpiper is the "student of Blake," referring to William Blake's "Auguries of Innocence":

> To see a World in a Grain of Sand,
> And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
> Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
> And Eternity in an hour (490)

The sandpiper does not measure time and nor seeks stability or order. He is searching the grains of sand as they are thrust forward and rapidly pulled backwards. He does not understand the mechanics of the tide nor scientific theories, nor does he need them, his focus is on life:

> The world is a mist. And then the world is
> minute and vast and clear. The tide
> is higher or lower. He couldn't tell you which.
> His beak is focused; he is preoccupied (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 131)

Relying on instincts, he does not need to question the fact that his world does not have clear borders or features, he does not need cultural concepts to enable him to interpret his world. The size of the world is irrelevant, when a grain of sand contains all he needs. In his world, the size, tides or borders have no value. Similarly to "Santarém," in "The Sansdpiper" Bishop employs a liminal landscape to question the necessity and constraints of human interpretation of the world based on science, reason, or classification, and to foreground the natural state of change and fluidity.

Alternative strategy is used in the poem "North Haven," where the speaker does not comment on the constant motion of individual grains of sand but rather absorbs the whole landscape, which is presented as unchanged:

> The islands haven't shifted since last summer,
> even if I like to pretend they have--
> drifting, in a dreamy sort of way,
> a little north, a little south, or sidewise--
> and that they're free within the blue frontiers of bay (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 188)

The poem is commemorating the death of the poet and Bishop's friend, Robert Lowell. The reading of the landscape is therefore adopted from a different perspective than in the above-mentioned poems. Death of a friend makes the speaker wish for a visible sign, a physical or geographical mark indicating that the world is affected by human end. Death is contextualized within both the permanence and fluidity of nature, as the speaker returns to the island, this time alone and depicts its pastoral, dreamy atmosphere. While the landscape remains seemingly the same, nature, as well Lowell's creative process once did, is constantly changing: "Nature repeats herself, or almost does: / repeat, repeat, repeat; revise, revise, revise" (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 188). The sparrows can change their song, yet North Haven is "anchored in its rock", the same way Lowell's poetry is now fixed on paper:

> You can't derange, or rearrange,
> your poems again. (But the sparrows can their song.)
> The words won't change again. Sad friend, you cannot change (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 189)

In terms of liminality, the memory of Lowell and his creative process of rewriting and constant recreating of his poems is analogically compared to the stable landscape that is, however, in flux and, as such, alive.

What is more important, while most studies consider temporariness to be of the essential features of liminality (see Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid"; Turner *Forest of Symbols*), in case of Bishop's landscape, liminality is not understood only as a permanent state but as a condition of life. This perpetual fluidity of the world provides a space creating new contexts and sensibilities that are open only to those who can read it via discourses that discard grand narratives, as Blake's mysticism or Emerson's insight prove to be more aligned with life itself.

While Bishop's landscapes are real, their characteristics are often emotionally colored or defamiliarized by the characters who inhabit them. She further explores the impact of culture, memory, and dislocation on reading of the landscape in another of her poems set on islands: "Crusoe in England." The protagonist, old Robinson muses over his life after returning to England, rewriting his memories of his stay on his island. He feels his story was never represented and understood the way it happened: "None of the books has ever got it right" (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 162). To tell his true story of exile, Crusoe exposes the liminality of this experience on the desert island by providing a mental map of his life there and contrasts it with his destination on another island: England, which in the end turned out to be even more solitary and barren. Crusoe depicts the changing nature and himself as the Adam, being one of a kind:

> The sun set in the sea; the same odd sun
> rose from the sea,
> and there was one of it and one of me.
> The island had one kind of everything:
> one tree snail, a bright violet-blue
> with a thin shell, crept over everything,
> over the one variety of tree,
> a sooty, scrub affair (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 163-4)

He tries to understand his surroundings by biological taxonomy, which, however, does not bring him any closer to understanding of his new world. As Turner observes: "By verbal and nonverbal means of classification we impose upon ourselves innumerable constraints and boundaries to keep chaos at bay, but often at the cost of failing to make discoveries and inventions" (*The Ritual Process*, vii). As long as Crusoe struggles to impose external cultural or scientific order and meaning on both the island and his quest, the potential of personal growth and self-redefinition cannot take place, as his mind uses patterns from other discourses:

> Well, I had fifty-two
> miserable, small volcanoes
> […]
> I'd think that if they were the size
> I thought volcanoes should be, then I had

become a giant;
and if I had become a giant,
I couldn't bear to think what size
the goats and turtles were (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 162)

Crusoe is lost not only in terms of biology or geography, but also in terms of time. He hopes to understand his surroundings by applying his previous knowledge received from books. Such attempts, however, are doomed to fail as the external knowledge does not correspond to his current experience and perception. This discrepancy makes him feel disoriented, lacking any sign of proportion: like a Gulliver the size of the world around him is not a stable measurable value. Nature is defamiliarized by his own civilized, i.e., pre-learned standards.

He realizes his insufficiency, noting that: "The books I'd read were full of blanks" (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 164). What he fails to accept is his lacking memory and inability to relate what he reads to his experience that makes him feel inadequate. Crusoe is quoting Wordsworth, claiming he remembers his poem (which is the way of Bishop's playful reminder not to take (his) memories as facts), yet not understanding that the text refers to "blissful solitude," while, ironically, it is solitude he detests.

Crusoe is recreating the world from his unreliable memory, projecting into the landscape his changing, liminal self and his sense of displacement. Yet his adapting to his new environment and uncalled-for quest for a new self does not come to him from nature automatically, as he seeks it in culture and in someone else's experience; with Bishop once again, alluding to Emerson's call for the individual connection with nature.

Crusoe is an outsider in the world, a man struggling to redefine himself. His knowledge as well as his memories are failing him. Relying on Darwin or taxonomy only leads him to further despair that enhances his alienation:

One billy-goat would stand on the volcano
I'd christened *Mont d'Espoir* or *Mount Despair*
(I'd time enough to play with names),
[…]
I got so tired of the very colors!
One day I dyed a baby goat bright red
with my red berries, just to see
something a little different.
And then his mother wouldn't recognize him (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 165)

By coloring the baby-goat he turns him into an outcast as well that, however, does not bring him relief or understanding of the place. Moreover, he shows his incomprehension by imitating the beginning of the world: naming places. Yet, as he is bored, he is changing the names according to his emotional states, oscillating between "despair"

and "d'Espoir,", i.e., glimmer of hope (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 165). The fruitlessness of his attitude and life is revealed to him especially in his dreams:

> I'd have
> nightmares of other islands
> stretching away from mine, infinities
> of islands, islands spawning islands,
> like frogs' eggs turning into polliwogs
> of islands, knowing that I had to live
> on each and every one, eventually,
> for ages, registering their flora,
> their fauna, their geography (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 165)

He feels trapped by his own endless urge to rationalize, personify and stabilize nature that keeps escaping and transcending his capacities. His view of his fate changed with Friday, as well as his use of language. Setting aside the naming games and self-pity, he depicts their relationship in plain words that finally appeal to him and regain their meaning: "Friday was nice. / Friday was nice, and we were friends" (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 165). This transformant shift towards inner meaning is, however, interrupted, when both Crusoe and Friday are discovered and shipped to England.

While Friday dies of measles, old and bitter Crusoe is once again trapped on an island, yet this time, drinking "real tea" (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 166). His meaningful human contact and the need for self-reliance vanished once his story became a best-seller, interpreting his life from the outside and turning himself into a celebrity of kind. One more time he feels alienated not only from other people but also from the objects that used to be essential to him:

> The knife there on the shelf—
> it reeked of meaning, like a crucifix.
> It lived. How many years did I
> beg it, implore it, not to break?
> […]
> Now it won't look at me at all.
> The living soul has dribbled away (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 166)

Crusoe keeps projecting his state of mind into the objects he once loved and used, yet the real sentiment does not belong to the island or the once valued things, it is Friday he mourns, and the temporariness of human life. He also mourns the loss of perspectives and inability of language to depict reality fully: not only he states in the opening of the poem that "the books never got it right", he repeats his sigh when introducing Friday "(Accounts of that everything all wrong.)" (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 166). Crusoe was trying to rationalize and classify the constantly changing nature and his own identity,

yet his liminal experience left him alienated in his own home country, including the people, food, or objects.

By writing the otherness into a space, Bishop offers the readers a safe "elsewhere" enabling them to cast away preconceived readings of the world and recognize that the constant state of liminality both in nature and mind (though unsettling) can turn out to be transformative, creative, and liberating. As Preston-Whyte notes, liminal spaces are "intangible, elusive, and obscure. They lie in a limbo-like space often beyond normal social and cultural constraints. In these spaces can be found brief moments of freedom and an escape from the daily grind of social responsibilities" (350). For Bishop, such moments are not necessarily brief and as she demonstrates in her poems, their effects are lasting, and potentially permanent.

Bishop often writes in an in-between space, manifesting the analogical fluidity of both geographies and identities. She also portrays the creation of an idea of a place, depicting the types of relationships one can adopt with the world. In her poetry, liminality is not a brief state but an essential condition of life. She chooses liminal landscapes to demonstrate their unsettling qualities, associated with fear and isolation, as she manifested in her poem "Crusoe in England," yet the same time, a creative potential and transformative powers as was shown in the poem "Santarém," where the changing social geographies dissolved the former conquests or slavery. Encounter with liminal landscapes, as Bishop suggests, can develop a new, potentially subversive tactics, or *techné* of reading the world and remembering it. Such encounters turn out transformative, as the subject of the liminal experience cannot return to their former selves, the same way as Crusoe could not assimilate back into the civilized social structure. As an artist, Bishop puts herself voluntarily into a liminal position between a tourist and a local, projecting and writing her expectations and cultural background into her narrative landscapes, proving with her poetry the creative power of recognized and embraced liminality.

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Abstract: The paper discusses the representation and understanding of liminal spaces and identities in the poems "Santarém," "Questions of Travel," "North Haven," and "Crusoe in England" by Elizabeth Bishop (1911–1979), focusing predominantly on her strategies of creating poetic landscapes that are not only geographical but more importantly, psychological, and spiritual. In her poetry Bishop reflects her own life-long liminal negotiations between an outsider (or a tourist), and a local. Many of her poems are set on the island, at the confluence of two rivers, or the coastline, highlighting the liminal aspect of both the landscape and her speakers. Yet the permanent fluidity, which forms the essence of the portrayed landscape is not portrayed or perceived as dangerous or harmful, but rather, as a source of a potential psychological transformation and creativity. Bishop's depiction of landscape is geographically and ethnographically accurate, yet at the same time, she highlights the necessarily cultural interpretations projected onto the place. The featured places as well as their observers are therefore forced to continually re-invent themselves. The analyzed poems feature a tourist or an outsider who is on a journey, or rather a quest that turns out liberating, as the speaker is freed from his/her everyday life and social structures. By observing and interacting with nature, the protagonist fulfils the Emersonian ideal of establishing original connection to nature, and often shed their preestablished notions, prejudice, or stereotypes, to adopt a new and fresh insight and relationship to the world. Only

by casting aside previous patterns of thought and habit, or the grand narratives (be it religion, culture, or science), can the irreducible complexity of reality and its constant fluidity be accepted and utilized. Travel is therefore portrayed as an essential human experience that enables the speakers to be in a distanced position of an outsider. Bishop uses liminal landscapes to question the necessity and constraints of human interpretation of the world based on science, reason, or classification, and to foreground the natural state of change and fluidity. The speakers who fail to recognize and accept the necessity of development and change, often rely on scientific classification or try to impose a cultural order on the landscapes, yet Bishop sees such patterns of behavior as fruitless and self-damaging, as she demonstrates in the poem "Crusoe in England." On the other hand, once the protagonists make a meaningful connection to the new sights and embrace the experience, the effects of their transformations are permanent. Liminality is therefore presented as a constant and potentially transformative process that is not only desirable, but above all, a sign of life.

Keywords: liminality, liminal landscape, Elizabeth Bishop, fluidity, Ralph Waldo Emerson, transition

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Liminality and Beyond: Conceptions of In-betweenness in American Culture and Literature

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THE BROWN BODY AS THIRDSPACE: TA-NEHISI COATES *BETWEEN THE WORLD AND ME*

Beginning the search for justice: the historical, material, fantastical body

What is so important about Soja's notion of "thirdspace," and why choose to reread Coates' very personal rumination upon the vulnerable black or brown body through Soja's theory? Firstly, Soja asserts that space is a social production—a site for the reproduction of social relations (Soja, *Thirdspace*, 2). Thus Soja's work is widely viewed as seminal to understanding current ideas regarding "spatial justice." However, it also becomes readily apparent as one moves through Coates' text, that the very "space" or "site" for the reproduction of U.S. "race" relations has historically been, and continues to be, the imagined, fantastical or mythologized but always very material brown or black body—*irrespective of its environment or location in space*. Secondly, Soja serviceably compares *thirdspace* to a palimpsest thus providing a multi-layered model for understanding how a type of body has come to be treated as a site for the reproduction of relationships of privilege, power, and fear (Soja, *Thirdspace*, 18). As defined by Webster's a palimpsest is (1) writing material (as a parchment or tablet) used one or more times after earlier writing has been erased [thus a kind of subtle revisiting of ghost impressions leftover from prior inscriptions]; or (2) something having diverse layers or aspects apparent beneath the surface. Skin for Coates' serves as a kind of "parchment," recalling a brown or tan fragment scored and overwritten with the physical and psychological marks of history. However, Coates is not only referring to the material, social and economic residuals of slavery and "Jim Crow" era rules and regulations, but to a fully internalized code of violence. Hence, to survive one must learn the proper measure of violence. As Coates reports,

> […] my father beat me for letting another boy steal from me. Two years later, he beat me for threatening my ninth-grade teacher. Not being violent enough could cost me my body. Being too violent could [also] cost me my body. (28)

In seeking to draw parameters for the pursuit of spatial justice, Soja admits that the body itself might be treated as a geographical feature or site for the production of injustice (*Seeking Spatial Justice,* 31). However, he places the body at one end of a continuum

opposite the physical geography of the planet, referring to "these two extremes" as defining the "outer limits" of "[spatial] justice (31)." Soja rather seeks to explore "how consequential geographies are produced in the spaces in between, [….] from the 'little tactics of the habitat' (referencing Michel Foucault) to the regional, national, and global expressions of geographically uneven development" (31). Coates, conversely, begins with the corporeal body and a very intimate rumination on vulnerability, thus giving palpable form to issues and practices that might otherwise remain abstract and theoretical. While recognizing that "little tactics of the habitat" are produced within a network of power relations, for Coates (also echoing Foucault) they are always first and foremost performed upon a material body—from the implicit motivations driving corporal punishment for transgressing familial boundaries, to the explicit codes of the "street," to the disciplinary standards encouraged by teachers and community leaders. Coates, rather than viewing the body as a sort of "outer shores," or as perhaps too broad of a location for a "useful" assessment of the effects of racism, sees it rather as ground zero: a measurable multi-layered territory, claimed and defined by various sub-communities needing to be guarded, supervised, and managed. Coates goes on to make salient the fact that the material, mental, fantastical, and spatial site for the enactment of the worst kind of racist violence in the U.S. has always been, and indeed continues to be, the corporeal body. Even the title of Coates' book, *Between the World and Me* seeks to engage with what Soja has deemed the "extremes" of spatial justice. Thus, it is with the hope of at least recognizing such "extremes" of injustice that I have broken down this analysis into the following sections: (1) Persons "who believe they are white"; (2) the historical black body as a site for enforcing docility and compliance; (3) the material black body as a fundamental location for the ongoing performance of violence; and finally, (4) the affective body as propelling narratives seeking justice.

Persons "who believe they are white"

Early on Coates calls into question the notion of racial classification by repeatedly referring to persons "who believe they are white." He employs this phrase to denote anyone assuming the privileges accorded this thing called "whiteness." In introducing the phrase Coates writes, "Americans believe in the reality of 'race' as a defined, indubitable feature of the natural world. […] In this way, racism is rendered as the innocent daughter of Mother Nature […]" (Coates 7). Hence, those "who believe they are white" Coates infers, feel entitled to dismiss the matter with the same distance and disavowal as one might regard "an earthquake" or perhaps a "tornado," placating any sense of responsibility by regarding "race" as something beyond individual control—merely one of many factual features of the environment (Coates 7). By calling out presuppositions

surrounding racial cataloging, Coates not only prompts us to recognize the unsettled material topography of racial fantasies, but also their convenience as an excuse for inaction.

The black body as a site for enforcing docility and compliance

Coates' begins his personal memorandum to the future by first reminiscing about his conflicted relationship with school—noting both a love of learning, but also a deep awareness of the many implicit repressive lessons camouflaged as such. Coates writes,

> The world had no time for the childhoods of black boys and girls. How could the schools? Algebra, Biology, and English were not subjects so much as opportunities to better discipline the body, to practice writing between the lines, copying the directions legibly, memorizing theorems extracted from the world they were created to represent. (26)

Coates goes on to specifically characterize the didactic material taught under the guise of black history as a sanitized "ritual review of the Civil Rights Movement," decrying in particular the frequent replaying of documentary footage of "peaceful" freedom marches (32). Coates reflects upon this moralizing and one sided message of "peacefulness" as he simultaneously recalls sitting quietly within a darkened school assembly hall watching projected images of brown and black bodies blasted by high-pressure hoses, beaten, dragged, and gassed. However, the *official* historical lesson Coates suggests was always already marked by compliance and docility; the archival film footage serving ostensibly as an endorsement for the ideal political protest—the acceptable or appropriate model for expressing civil unrest. Even the term "unrest" now seems anemic and outdated in comparison to the more recent and now widely preferred term "woke." The first term suggesting one is not "sleeping well," implying a modicum of uneasiness, with the latter word signifying conversely, arousal or sudden alertness—inferring (bodily) readiness. In calling attention to the almost complete erasure from the classroom civics lesson of any and all counter narratives of confrontation, anger and outrage (the 1965 Los Angeles Watts rebellion, the 1967 Detroit 12th Street riots) Coates reflexively asks "Why were only our heroes nonviolent?" (32).

Interestingly, Soja also points towards the rising social tensions of the 1960s as shifting our way of thinking to include both material (first space) and mental (second space) (Soja. *Thirdspace*, 6). Soja goes on to describe first space as "focused on the real material world," whereas second space "interprets this reality through imagined representation of spatiality" (6). Coates, in relaying his adolescent experience with "African American history," intuitively focuses upon the material world (first space) as graphic evidence of the infliction of physical pain upon the flesh and blood bodies of the freedom marchers, only then to have his impression instructionally reinscribed as the imagined space of

order and virtue (or second space). But, what of Soja's notion of *thirdspace*? Soja defines *thirdspace* as "sites in which inextricably intertwined temporal, social, and spatial relations are […] constantly reinscribed, erased, and reinscribed again" (Soja 18). Here, I assert, the "material space of inscription" was literally the bodies of men, women, and children, although the mental (psychological and fantastical) educational space opened up by the replaying of such images was that of compliance disguised as a memorandum from the moral high ground. Thus, while "diplomacy" is officially framed as the only appropriate reaction to significant injustice, Coates responds to such tacit directives by calling them out, writing: "I speak not of the morality of nonviolence, but of the sense that blacks are in especial need of the morality," hence, reframing the pedagogical lesson yet again (32).

The body as the fundamental location for the ongoing performance of racism

A teenager pulls a gun from the waistband of his pants in front of the local convenience store, a father feels seething anger towards a stranger who impatiently pushes aside his young child, a young man is shot driving to see his girlfriend—the geographical locations shift, but the bodies involved remain equally both real and imagined, material and fantastical; reduced to a specific site for replaying and enforcing the borders, margins and limits delineating the *proper* racial contours of precincts, neighborhoods and communities. Coates, in intentionally deploying the word "body" rather than "person," signals to his readers his intimacy with historical and political modes of cancelling (or at least attempting to annul) evidence of the "individual." The historical brown or black body has not only been reduced to "property," but has also been summarily treated as an environmental element marking the contours of substandard localities or undesirable spaces. Likewise, majority African American urban neighborhoods have continued to be conceived as a space apart, as clearly delineated heterotopic sites. Soja, in confirming this view, writes, "Space is not an empty void. It is always filled with politics, ideology, and other forces shaping our lives and challenging us to engage in struggles over geography" (Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice*, 19). Although, here it's worth noting that the defining topographical feature, the thing that sets this space apart *is* the fact that it contains a sizeable proportion of black or brown bodies.

Reflecting on a more subjective level, Coates bemoans how "those who think they are white" have, after reading his book, often amusingly inquired as to the condition and health of Coates' own material body (Coates 5). Coates's directly challenges the discursive space opened up by such public displays of cleverness and disavowal while also recognizing in these exchanges clumsy efforts to diffuse the discomfort engendered by discussions of racially situated aggression and violence.

Moreover, by effectively probing what it means to live day to day with the pervasive anxiety occasioned and predicated upon having a black or brown body, Coates makes such feelings salient for all readers. In one section of the narrative he carefully contemplates a watershed moment in his own smaller history—the senseless shooting of a college friend (Prince Jones) by police in close proximity to a wealthy historically black county within the state of Virginia. As the legal story goes, the young man resisted arrest. However, Coates' broader narrative follows the specifics of the young man's short life—he was a graduate of Howard University, he came from a "good family," he had never been in any sort of legal trouble, he was simply driving his new Jeep (a recent gift from his mother) from Maryland to Virginia to visit his fiancé. Coates, while anticipating obfuscation from law enforcement also reacts with some surprise to the tepid response on the part of the wealthy majority African American suburban community where the "incident" occurred. Struggling to explain what he perceives as an almost complete lack of empathy, Coates now turns to challenge the fantasies produced and sustained via economic status. He openly laments what he views as a form of collective delusional thinking predicated upon a logic of fiscal uniqueness—a narrative of cultural prestige standing in sharp contrast to the nightmare of statistical reality. It is not just a media generated perception that brown and black individuals are killed at significantly higher rates than other racial groups. Statistics demonstrate African Americans are three times more likely to be killed in an encounter with police than whites, and a full 21% of African Americans shot by police between 2013 and 2018 were unarmed (*Mapping Police Violence*).

Soja, however, approaches this same reluctance to respond or engage from a different perspective, noting a growing phenomenon he refers to "security-obsession" (Soja 42). In his text *On the Production of Unjust Geographies* Soja discusses the recent uptick in the "defensive fortressing of urban life and urban space built on a pyschogeography […] of fear and aimed at protecting residents and property against real or imagined threats of invasion (42)." Soja points towards such geographical features as gated communities and other "microtechnologies of social and spatial control" now widely implemented to enclose or safeguard wealthy urban and suburban communities (43). What is ironic about the particular narrative of events as relayed by Coates however, is the complete disconnect on the part of this particular affluent community to an individual who by all educational and financial benchmarks belonged to the same social group. Prince Jones was from a professional family, albeit, via a negative encounter with law enforcement he has summarily been transformed into an undesirable body, a body that must be kept outside the community "safe zone." Thus, the young Prince Jones is treated as just another indistinguishable black man dying on the side of an interstate highway—reduced to a brief notice in the hometown newspaper and a short-lived item on the

local evening news. Coates writes, "I was told that the citizens [of this specific community] were more likely to ask for police support than to complain about brutality" (84). He goes on to say that he has heard such explanations before, most law-abiding citizens, even those with black or brown bodies "had 'a certain impatience' with crime" (84). However, Coates responds "I knew that these were theories, even in the mouths of black people, that justified the jails springing up around me, that argued for ghettos and projects, that viewed the destruction of the black body as incidental to the preservation of order" (84).

Coates expresses both incredulity and disappointment towards this refusal to engage on the part of the very individuals he sees as best positioned to shift the conversation, to make salient the disparity in the way different bodies intersect with, and are traversed by, law enforcement. Voicing particular distain, Coates refers to this group as the "Dreamers." He goes on to lament "I am convinced that the Dreamers, at least the Dreamers of today, would rather live white than live free. In the Dream they are Buck Rogers, Prince Aragorn, an entire race of Skywalkers. To awaken them is to reveal that they are an empire of humans and, like all empires of humans, are built on the destruction of the body" (143). Hence, while we may shift our environment and adjust the organization of space, material goods, services, etc., Coates again laments that there appears (at least for the foreseeable future) to be no escaping the multifaceted mapping of the black body as the orthodox site for the inscription of violence.

In the aftermath of this horrible affair Coates eventually shifts from grappling with personal consequences (attending the funeral, consoling friends and family) to ponder a longstanding continuum of parental disciplinary ferocity. He recounts the harsh discipline enacted upon his own defenseless young body by his parents, and points out that corporeal punishment is still widely dispensed within African American families. Although, Coates also suggests that this might be understood as a serviceable "[…] philosophy of the disembodied, of a people who control nothing, who can protect nothing, who are made to fear not just the criminals among them, but the police who lord over them with all the moral authority of a protection racket" (82). As a preventative measure the regulating of black or brown bodies starts at home. Even the smallest brown or black body is inherently in danger, and this threat will only increase with time and maturity. So, as the logic goes, the body must be trained and hardened for long-term survival. Here the body itself is understood as a battleground where competing factions skirmish for turf, influence, and control.

Addressing his infant son Coates writes:

> Now at night, I held you and a great fear, wide as all our American generations, took me. Now I personally understood my father and the old mantra—'Either I can beat him or the police.' […] Black people loved their children with a kind of obsession. You are all we have

> and you come to us endangered. I think we would like to kill you ourselves before seeing you killed by the streets that America made. (82)

In ruminating upon the familial fears driving the dispensing of corporeal punishment Coates points again towards the implicit structural tendency to treat the flesh and blood black or brown body as a potential disaster site—an incontrovertible and providential geography ("killed by the streets that America made"). Hence, it is not a matter of "if," but "when" such cataclysm will strike (Coates 82). Citing the desperately "tight grip" of his mother's hand he goes on to suggest that this is perhaps the single most reasonable response to a world in which only the victim is held liable. Coates, giving voice to his mother's anxiety writes, "[…] no one would be brought to account for this destruction, because my death would not be the fault of any human but the fault of some unfortunate but immutable fact of 'race,' imposed upon an innocent country by the inscrutable judgment of gods" (82-83).

The vulnerable black or brown body as a site for propelling narratives of justice

Soja ponders a number of both legal and cultural conceptions of "justice." He first considers the use of the term to denote a specific department within the U.S. Federal government, and also the "public official authorized to decide questions brought before a court of law, such as a justice of the Supreme Court or, at a much lower level authority, a justice of the peace" (*Seeking Spatial Justice*, 20). But he also suggests that the term has taken on much "broader meaning" connoting "fairness" (20). So what does it mean to be "fair" or to treat someone "fairly," and how has this notion of fairness been connected to the original legal import of "justice"? We have indeed over time come to think of fairness as a sort of "evenhandedness." Hence, by extension, there can be no expectation to follow the law without, Soja believes, also recognizing fundamental "human rights" (20).

Given this more spacious notion of justice as "fairness," Soja then moves on to consider its relationship to other valued qualities of life including "freedom, liberty, equality, democracy [and] civil rights" (20). Justice, Soja avers, has ostensibly taken on a new urgency in contemporary life. In many ways it has come to replace prior deliberations regarding what would properly constitute "freedom" (a conversation he suggests that has come to feel "outdated"), and ongoing but compromised cultural battles over "equality" (a term that has itself become "embattled" and critically challenged as an impossible ideal) (21). To further demonstrate what Soja asserts is an increasing focus on social, material, and spatial notions of justice, he includes within his notes and references a list of the appellations of numerous activist organizations

prominently featuring the word itself including *United for Peace and Justice*, *Interfaith Community for Economic Justice*, and the *Environmental Justice Foundation* to name just a few (Soja 209). Interestingly, the term "justice" has also been recently deployed as a socially motivated counter narrative to one of its most authoritative denotations. Addressed to those who are officially known as "justices of the peace," many members of the African American community have repeatedly put local, regional and federal law enforcement on notice by emphatically asserting that without "justice" there will be no "peace." Thereby foregrounding within public consciousness radically contrasting race-based notions of what it means to dispense "justice."

However, Soja also submits that "Justice in the contemporary world has been developing a political meaning that transcends the defined categories of race, gender, class, nationality, sexual preference, and other forms of homogeneous and often exclusive group or community identity" (Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice*, 24). He goes on to assert that by "doing so, it helps to bring together the diverse movements built around each of these specific axes of unequal power relations in a common project (24). He further suggests that utilizing an "explicitly spatialized form of social and economic justice," may provide a more useful avenue for bonding often-competing social groups into more "pluralistic" alliances for change (24). While Soja is very concerned with the impact of global economic and political restructuring on gender, class, race and ethnicity, he also believes it is better dealt with as a condition of the environment rather than as a characteristic inhering within the individual (31). To demonstrate the effectiveness of this shift in strategy, Soja points towards the impact of grassroots activism on such things as mass transit policy and clean water mandates. The implicit idea here being that if we effect structural and environmental change, shifting attitudes and beliefs will eventually follow. And even if such cultural attitude shifts fail to broadly manifest, at the very least some modicum of *justice* has been served. Thus the world has become (even if only by a small measure) better.

Soja writes, "As intrinsically spatial beings from birth we are at all times engaged and enmeshed in shaping our socialized spatialities and, simultaneously, being shaped by them. In other words, we make our geographies just as it has been said that we make our histories, not under conditions of our own choosing but in the material and imagined world we collectively have already created—or that have been created for us" (Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice,* 18). In the face of daunting social, material, and historical obstacles, Soja advocates "thirdspace" writing as a purposive mode of working towards what he refers to as "emancipatory praxis"—a consciously spatial effort to improve the world in some significant manner (Soja 22).

While Coates undoubtedly believes such spatial modes of resistance to the status quo are necessary, he also asserts that nobody, that is, no "black" body can resolutely

escape geography, but rather conversely has continued to function as the location, occasion, and rationale for violence.

Coates' own work moreover, can also be understood as a mode of "thirdspace" writing or emancipatory praxis. By effectively weaving together journalism, prose, political commentary and personal narratives, Coates presents the reader with a poignant description of what it's like to navigate through life within the U.S. with a black or brown body. Moreover, he makes the experience intimate by recounting his own family history from his father's involvement in the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s to his very positive experiences as a student at Howard University, to the birth of his own son. By integrating prose-like passages within his hybrid text Coates does more than verify historical or autobiographical events—he gives the reader a "feel" for what it's like to experience these things; bringing us face-to-face with our own uncertainties. For example, in response to the violent death of his college friend, Prince Jones, he reports "This entire episode took me from fear to a rage that burned in me then, animates me now, and will likely leave me on fire for the rest of my days. I still had my journalism. My response was, in this moment, to write" (Coates 83). However, Coates wants this specific work, *Between the World and Me*, to function beyond the reach of journalism—as more than a factual accounting of events. In weaving together a variety of approaches, his hope is that we can see ourselves reflected within his narrative irrespective of whether we ourselves have a black or brown body, or conversely, are one of those who as Coates' put it "believe they are white." Albeit, it is this last group as identified within *Between the World and Me* that is seemingly most emphatically called out—those most likely to think this account is not about them, should not concern them, and consequently may be disregarded.

A note to the future

Coates recognizes that while he may be considered successful by most cultural measures, he is still very much a wounded man. In so reflecting, he also recognizes his own role in the continuum of violence. Addressing his son he writes, "I am now ashamed of the thought, ashamed of my fear, of the generational chains I tried to clasp onto your wrists. Your mother had to teach me how to love you […]." However, Coates does not end his narrative in despair but rather expresses the hopes and dreams of a father. Again, speaking directly to his son he writes "The birth of a better world is not ultimately up to you, though I know, each day there are grown men and women who will tell you otherwise"—going on to declare, "I love you, and I love the world, and I love it more with every new inch I discover. But you are a black boy, and you must be responsible for your body in a way that other boys cannot know" (Coates 71). Once again prompt-

ing us to see that a "black" body continues to function as a sort of inescapable feature that contextualizes every landscape, site or location.

In reading this book, it should be obvious that Coates is not merely speaking as a father to his son, but rather challenging widespread attempts at disavowal. He calls us all to account for the historically multi-layered but always-embodied continuum of violence. Albeit, in doing so, he effectively sends his memorandum of care into the future. A missive we may all do well to heed, keeping in mind that Michael Brown (14 years-old), Tamir Rice (12), and more recently, Antwon Rose Jr. (17) were also America's children (Quah).

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Abstract: Edward Soja's work regarding spatial understanding has become key to discerning a radical shift in the way we frame and then reason about otherness, and more specifically, exclusion. But rather than viewing otherness and exclusion as merely the result of relationships reproduced within our *environment*, author and political analyst Ta-Nehisi Coates suggests that it is the vulnerable black or brown body that has historically been the site for the violent performance of racism. Thus, this paper filters Coates' recently released book *Between the World and Me* through Soja's work to demonstrate how the body itself can function as "thirdspace." Coates' text, I argue, traces a complex multilayered geography of fantasy, myth, beauty, and horror as it has been visited upon the corporeal body. Hence, what appears on the surface to be a personal reflection on vulnerability and survival also exposes the material body as a palimpsest of violence inscribed from person-to-person, community-to-community, (and even as Coates himself points out), father to son. In doing so, he offers us a raw and often very sincere rumination upon his father's and his own often-unwitting collusion with an ongoing cycle of violence. However, Coates also sees a way to move beyond the limitations of the present. By stylistically adopting the format of an extended confessional note addressed to his young son, Coates not only queries his own past, but also sends a very personal message of love and hope into the future.
Key words: racism, thirdspace, the body, justice

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