Transnational Communities and the Novel in the Age of Globalization

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The novel is generally read through a Western lens that privileges both individual subjectivity and the nation-state. My dissertation acts as an intervention into the critical tradition that sees the novel as a genre preoccupied with the individual, the nation-state, and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship through which the two relate to each other. This tradition includes seminal theorists Ian Watt, Fredric Jameson, and Benedict Anderson as well as contemporary critics such as Pascale Casanova and Joseph Slaughter. *Transnational Communities* challenges this accepted framework for understanding the novel genre through an examination of novels which decenter the categories of individual and nation-state and argues that in this moment of unprecedented globalization, the novel's ability to imagine new forms of community is an increasingly relevant social function.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THE SITUATION OF RESEARCH : A PREFATORY NOTE

       The following dissertation is deeply rooted both in the present geopolitical moment and in my particular subject position in relation to that moment. This being the case, I am compelled to situate the circumstances of this undertaking.

       Over the past two years I've often felt that I was writing this dissertation at the most exciting time possible. Political analysts fret that the rules and norms that have governed international relations since the aftermath of World War II are at risk of total collapse[1]; at the same time, the wave of unfettered optimism about global capitalism that followed the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 appears to have run its course[2]. We are exiting the era of optimistic free market interdependence that gave birth to NAFTA and the E.U. while desiccating the protectionist policies of nations like China and India, and we are entering a new era, one defined by rising nationalism and epitomized by phenomena such as "Brexit" (2016) and the election of anti-immigration candidates like Donald Trump in the U.S. (2016) and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil (2018).

       So much of what we are now experiencing geopolitically would have seemed farfetched ten or even three years ago; Donald Trump was not considered a serious

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[1] Foa and Mounk (2017) warn of a rise in support for authoritarianism among citizens of established Western democracies; Schwartz (2018) demonstrates that the norms governing international asylum have already effectively collapsed.
[2] The international success of Thomas Piketty's *Capital* (2014) is evidence that skepticism towards capitalism has successfully infiltrated mainstream economic thought.

contender for the republican nomination in 2015, but rode to the presidency on a wave of

nationalism and anti-immigrant sentiment that shocked and puzzled the same political

theorists whose job was to see it coming.[3] While everyone scrambled to develop new

theoretical frameworks capable of explaining what we were seeing, I was installed in

Boston College's English department studying novels, and so it seemed reasonable to ask

the novels if they knew anything about all this, and what they thought about it.

This dissertation is the result of two years spent shaking novels and asking them

to explain. While the novels did not provide a straightforward answer to my most vexing

questions—novels, and particularly good novels, not being known for their

straightforwardness—over the course of my inquiry they did gesture towards alternative

networks of community and affiliation which transcend, and sometimes even oppose,

national borders.

My own subject-position as a researcher is not immaterial. I am not writing from

the global south. I am a white United States citizen, with all of the immense privilege that

that entails. I have spent most of my life in New Orleans, a city with a vexed relationship

to colonialism and imperialism: it was home to both the largest slave market in the

antebellum United States[4] and the golden age of free people of color.[5] My family has

been in New Orleans since the 1700s, and my heritage is testament to how ideas about

race have shifted over time. I am descended from white creole slaveholders on my

mother's side, while on my father's side I am descended from the Sicilian Matranga

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[3] See Gruber (2016), an apology on behalf of the discipline of political science for its
abysmal failure to predict the results of the 2016 elections.
[4] See Mcinnis (2013) for an overview of the New Orleans antebellum slave trade.
[5] See Sumpter (2008) for an overview of the golden age of free people of color.

family, many of whom were killed in one of the largest mass lynchings in American history in 1891. I say this not in an attempt to qualify my whiteness, but to emphasize the mutability of racial categories. I am white and American largely due to the arbitrary vicissitudes of history: the migration of French, Sicilian, and Irish settlers; the Louisiana purchase and the expansion of American borders; the Civil War's effect on race relations in Louisiana; and changing definitions of whiteness in broader American culture. All of this in combination has gifted me with incredible privilege. It has also estranged me somewhat from the subject of my research here.

As a white American, the task of gaining expertise in the field of colonial literature is daunting; I know very well that I could spend the rest of my life studying Indian literature and culture and still fail to grasp cultural cues intuitive to an Indian child. Here I have undertaken to analyze literature from several countries within a global context, an endeavor that demands humility. Although I approach this topic as an outsider, I believe such an approach is worthwhile; learning about other canons of literature and contending with globalization is something that everyone should be doing, not only those regarded as "others." I believe that there is value to white Westerners adopting postcolonial approaches. This position requires vigilance—I do not intend to gentrify the field of postcolonial studies, and I must make a conscious effort not to do so as I apply a postcolonial lens not of my invention to the novel genre. With this in mind, both this prefatory note and the postscript that concludes this dissertation are written in a self-reflexive mode, in an attempt to transparently reckon with my vexed subject-position.

For decades, literary critics have regarded the novel genre as inextricably tied to the institution of the nation-state; a multitude of critical works, from Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* in 1957 to Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* in 1983, can attest to this. Crucial to the novel's emergence as a nationalist genre is the even-more-nationalist subgenre of the *Bildungsroman*, in which a singular youthful protagonist is "built" into the adult citizen of a nation-state.[6] During the early stages of this dissertation, I vaguely hypothesized that the global postcolonial novel might speak to the *Bildungsroman* genre in interesting ways. After two years of research, I present an array of postcolonial novels which challenge the *Bildungsroman* form structurally and conceptually. These novels raise provocative questions: Is the novel genre as inherently nationalist as critics have heretofore assumed? How, then, shall we interpret novels that seem to contradict Anderson's seminal text by imaginatively creating transnational communities, rather than national ones? And should the proliferation of these transnational novels tell us anything about our own present, and the vexed role of the nation-state in a rapidly globalizing world?

For answers to these questions, first I turned to *The Lowland* (2013), a novel about complex transcontinental networks of affiliation among Indian migrants to America, who balance affiliative links to each other, their families and friends in India,

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[6] The *Bildungsroman* is a favorite topic among literary theorists; space permits only some of the major works to be listed here. Jerome Hamilton Buckley (1974) traces the *Bildungsroman*'s development from the mid-nineteenth century through the 1960s; Franco Moretti (1987) outlines the *Bildungsroman*'s cultural-historical role as a reflection of European modernity; Joseph Slaughter (2007, 2011) analyzes the genre within the legal context of human rights; Jed Esty (2011) examines how the genre is altered upon being translated to the colonial periphery. The reader who wishes to know more about Joseph Slaughter's argument in relation to my own may consult the introduction; for more on Jed Esty, see my fourth chapter.

and Americans of different ethnic and racial backgrounds. I use the metaphor of the banyan, a tree whose aerial roots become accessory trunks, to examine how transnational migrants in *The Lowland* are multiply and complexly rooted and how their networks of affiliation and community identification change and evolve over time.

In my examination of Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* (2016), I argue that the novel's structure resists the identification of one or more protagonists, thereby subverting expectations about the novel as a genre. This refusal to identify individual protagonists, I argue, places the emphasis on networks of affiliation between the characters rather than the characters as individuals. The novel's protagonist is the community of characters who, in their kinship across spans of distance and time, gesture towards the broader community of the transnational African diaspora.

Next I turned to Laila Lalami's *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (2005). *Hope...* is structurally similar to *Homegoing*, with different characters appearing in each chapter. The four characters who anchor the novel by appearing in multiple chapters all share a nationality, being Moroccan in origin. However, upon further examination I found that these four Moroccan characters all participate in transnational community; whether or not they successfully migrate to the E.U., all four characters exist in a society where migration is both a dream and a possibility, and even those who choose to stay participate in a global economy saturated with tourists and foreign goods.

In my final chapter I examine Patricia Schonstein Pinnock's *Skyline* (2000), a narrative about a young girl who lives in an apartment complex populated by undocumented migrants. Unlike the other novels that I examine, *Skyline* is structurally similar to the traditional *Bildungsroman*, focused on a single youthful protagonist;

however, drawing on ideas from Jed Esty's *Unseasonable Youth* (2012), my analysis emphasizes the ways in which the protagonist fails to achieve a traditional, stable adulthood grounded in her status as a citizen, instead attaining a "moral adulthood" rooted in transnational community. Her development occurs through the witness of the testimony of non-citizen characters, provoking questions about the role of testimony in the development of the citizen-subject of human rights.

In my postscript, "Dispatches from Cape Town," I apply the same methodology that guides my analysis of the global novel to a radically different context: the Open Book Festival in Cape Town, which I attended in September of 2017. Despite South Africa's staggering wealth inequality[7], its relative peace and prosperity makes it a destination for migrants from other African nations.[8] At the Open Book Festival, discussions about books were inseparable from the conversation surrounding South Africa's place in a rapidly evolving global economy.

It is my belief that we are at one of history's great crossroads. Through this dissertation, I hope to play some small role in elucidating the creative acts through which novelists are imagining new ways to be in community with each other. At their best, the communities here examined gesture towards a way of being that feels both ancient and new. Transcendence of the nation-state as a means of identity and connection feels reminiscent of premodernity, before the nation-state's ascent to prominence; simultaneously, these networks of affiliation diverge wildly from premodern community in their use of technology, from plane travel to web-based communication, to facilitate

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[7] See the World Bank (2018) and *The Guardian's* Inequality Project (2017) for detailed statistics about inequality in South Africa.
[8] See United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2017) for more information about immigration to South Africa.

acts of intimacy across thousands of miles. However, the novels depicted here do not shy away from a discussion of nationalism and its effects, nor do they pretend to be witnessing the death-knell of a force that seems at times to be as strong as ever.

I write this preface on March 15th, 2019; last night, news broke of a series of coordinated attacks on mosques in New Zealand. Today it is Friday afternoon in the United States and Saturday morning in New Zealand; the death count currently rests at forty-nine, and my social media feeds are teeming with updates and condolences from friends, acquaintances, and public figures.

I know no one in New Zealand, yet this news feels deeply relevant to me. The act of nationalism which inspired this act of terror is, paradoxically, the global nationalism of white supremacy, and could easily happen in my city. From the other side of the world, Americans witness this event; some express outrage, while some, no doubt, log into white supremacist forums to express admiration and sympathy for the terrorist. From 7000 miles away I resonate with shock and grief. With one eye on my inbox and my social media feeds, I turn to revising my first chapter.

INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union's dissolution, the triumphant forward march of capitalism seemed like a foregone conclusion.[9] Advances in technology made sprawling multinational corporations more efficient and profitable than ever before.[10] The Soviet Union's collapse and the corresponding blow to communism's perceived viability as an economic system meant that capitalist morale was at an all-time high. Formerly communist nations accepted their integration into the global economic system, creating new markets.[11] Western economists waxed rhapsodic about capitalism and free trade: not only was neoliberal capitalism the superior economic system, but the creation and integration of new markets would hasten the spread of human rights, and "developing" nations, provided they abided by the policy

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[9] See Francis Fukuyama's "The End of History?" (1989) which argued that the end of the Cold War heralded "the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government" (4).

[10] See McKinsey Global Institute (2015): "The world's large companies, and particularly the biggest Western firms, have had an extraordinary three decades. By any measure, pre- or post-tax, profits are up sharply… The most successful companies have grown as large as entire nations" (1-2).

[11] Chapters eleven and twelve of Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine* (2007) contain a compelling account of Russia's incorporation into the global economy.

recommendations of the Washington Consensus, would inevitably achieve Western levels of prosperity.[12]

This political and economic moment was defined by a tension between unfettered optimism about global trade and resistance to the tumult and disruption that globalization engendered. In India in 1991, a massive economic crisis forced the government to take a large loan from the IMF, using the entirety of India's gold reserves as collateral; the loan was conditional upon India abandoning its protectionist policies and pursuing an economic strategy of liberalization and global integration.[13] In South Africa, a series of negotiations lasting from '91 through '93 dismantled apartheid with the aim of ending widespread divestment and reintegrating South Africa into the global economy.[14] In Nigeria, activism against multinational corporations like Shell led to a government crackdown that culminated in the execution of the "Ogoni 9" in 1995.[15]

These events demonstrate three key truths about '90s globalization. Firstly, the global economy was experiencing an unprecedented level of economic interdependence. Secondly, this economic interdependence could be, and was, weaponized both for and against governments, peoples, and corporations. Thirdly, globalization threatened the supremacy of nationalism, which was still a young concept in many parts of the globe, as

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[12] For a discussion of the collaborative relationship between Chicago School economics and human rights discourse during this era, see Gathii (2000) and Moyn (2010).
[13] For a contemporaneous account of the 1991 financial crisis and the IMF's intervention, see Weinraub (1991). For a more detailed account of the reforms, see Ghosh (2006) and Waquar (2014). Ghosh provides a more positive and universalizing perspective on the reforms, while Waquar focuses on the particular context of the 1991 crisis.
[14] For an account of South Africa's economic transformation post-Apartheid see Bond (2014) and Klein (2007).
[15] The legal case against Shell is ongoing; see Amnesty International (2017) and (2019).

the defining category in the lives of civilians whose lives were increasingly dominated by global capitalism.

The E.U.'s formation in 1993 may be read as an instance of Europe embracing this third principle of globalization: the member-states of the European Union made the decision to identify not only as individual, culturally homogenous nation-states, but as a trade bloc composed of nations with widely divergent histories and cultures.[16] Throughout the '90s and early 2000s the European Union thrived, gaining members and economic power. In 1993, according to figures from the World Bank, the E.U.'s combined GDP was 7.8 trillion, whereas in 2008 the E.U. could boast a combined GDP of over 19 trillion, over a quarter of the global GDP (The World Bank, "European Union"). Some of this increase was due to the incorporation of new members, but much was stimulated by the free flow of goods and workers across the borders of European nation-states.[17] Public opinion credited the E.U.'s economic unity for stability in the region to the extent that the E.U. was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012 merely for existing (The Nobel Peace Prize).

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri wrote *Empire* in the mid-90s, when liberal optimism about globalization was at its peak. Nationalism is not the enemy of interest for Hardt and Negri; they argue that advocates for liberal values such as diversity and cosmopolitanism are fighting the last war. To quote Hardt and Negri:

> When we begin to consider the ideologies of corporate capital and the
>
> world market, it certainly appears that the postmodernist and postcolonial

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[16] See Nodia (2017) for a discussion of the European Union as an example of optimistic post-Cold War globalization.
[17] As demonstrated by Campos, Coricelli, and Moretti (2018).

theorists who advocate for a politics of difference, fluidity, and hybridity

in order to challenge the binaries and essentialism of modern sovereignty

have been outflanked by the strategies of power. Power has evacuated the

bastion they are attacking and has circled around to their rear to join them

in the assault in the name of difference. (Hardt and Negri 138)

As Hardt and Negri observe, movements that critique structures of power (such as

postcolonialism) run the risk of being co-opted by the same powers they

originally rose to critique.

Hardt and Negri's project could be understood as an attempt to update the

Foucauldian concept of sovereignty for an age in which the nation-state is increasingly

obsolete. In several lectures given at the Collège de France, Foucault outlined the concept

of biopower, or a sovereign's power over the bodies of its subjects; these meditations first

appeared in print in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*. Foucault argues that the medieval

sovereign's control over his subjects was far from total, and was in fact limited to his/her

right to kill subjects or allow them to live:

The sovereign exercised his right of life only by exercising his right to kill,

or by refraining from killing; he evidenced his power over life only

through the death he was capable of requiring. The right which was

formulated as the 'power of life and death' was in reality the right to *take*

life or *let* live." (Foucault 136)

By contrast, the depersonalized sovereignty found in contemporary democratic nations,

which is generally regarded as less oppressive, in fact exercises total control over its

subjects:

[W]ars were never as bloody as they have been since the nineteenth century… never before did regimes visit such holocausts on their own populations. But this formidable power of death---and this is perhaps what accounts for part of its force and the cynicism with which it has so greatly expanded its limits---now presents itself as the counterpart of a power that exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations. (136-7)

This is a common move in Foucault: a modern system that the West applauds itself for using, that is considered humane and morally superior, is revealed to be as oppressive, and sometimes more oppressive, than the "backwards" system that it replaced. In this case, it is the freedom of the modern nation-state that is called into question. Foucault argues that the institutions that supposedly make us "free" in actuality control us more completely than a medieval monarch ever could: "One might say that the ancient right to *take* life or *let* live was replaced by a power to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death" (138). Within the modern nation-state, it is possible to destroy a community by ignoring it, refusing to foster its life. Take for example the act of negligence that caused lead contamination in Flint, Michigan in 2014, which was not an open act of aggression but nevertheless had a devastating impact on the community of Flint.[18]

While Foucault saw the sovereign nation-state as the primary controller of biopower, Hardt and Negri argue that sovereignty, and therefore biopower, is more concentrated in transnational institutions. They posit three "tiers" of control where

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[18] For an overview of the Flint water crisis, see Ray (2019).

biopower circulates: first, transnational entities such as the U.N., I.M.F., W.H.O., and World Bank; secondly, the nation-state; and thirdly, NGOs such as MSF, Catholic Charities, and Oxfam. Hardt and Negri recognize that none of these tiers have a monopoly on the circulation of biopower, and that the lives of any individual citizen might possibly be impacted by dozens of these organizations and their interactions.

Although theoretically useful, to the contemporary reader Hardt and Negri's discussions of the power of transnational organizations may seem a bit dated. Our era is marked by renewed nationalist fervor and widespread distrust of international institutions; see, for example, the phenomenon of "Brexit" from the European Union, or US president Donald Trump's 2017 assertions that he was elected to represent "Pittsburgh, not Paris" (Merica). Although this nationalist resurgence has picked up amazing speed in the past few years, one can trace its inception to a confluence of two events: 2001's 9/11, which presented Western nations with a new enemy in the form of global terrorism, and 2008's global financial crisis, which led to a discussion of increasing income inequality both domestically and abroad. Interestingly, the 90s utopian "moment" has not been entirely extinguished; rather, it exists alongside a new moment of political and economic insecurity. On the spectrum of cosmopolitan to nationalist, a wide range of positions are available: liberal supporters of global cosmopolitanism have become advocates for more interventionist domestic economic policy, while conservatives who once trumpeted the economic virtues of open borders are now embracing calls to exit trade agreements. Indeed, under Trump's presidency nationalism and cosmopolitanism have hybridized in new ways: Trump is trying to end the United States' participation in trade deals like NAFTA, a triumph of '90s cosmopolitan

capitalism, while simultaneously engaging in a push for widespread corporate deregulation that '90s cosmopolitan capitalists might well have embraced. Our era may be defined by the confusing and often synergistic tension between international and national institutions.

While Hardt and Negri are focused on the relationship between these institutions and the multitudes that they regulate, they pay less attention to the tension between these multiple loci of biopower, and they underemphasize that these loci are often in conflict. This dissertation refuses to view Empire as a single totalizing entity; rather, I argue that recognition of the tension between transnational institutions (Hardt and Negri's first tier) and nation-states (their second) is crucial to an understanding of the contemporary political landscape. Many of the novels examined within this dissertation explore the tension between a character's conflicting identities as both a national and a global citizen, and it is within this tension between individual, national, and global alliances that we locate the cosmopolitan novel.

World Literature and Globalization: The Existing Discourse

It is generally accepted in literature departments that media matters, both in its content and in how it is produced, circulated, and consumed. While scholars like Harold Bloom have argued that media matters because it preserves and enriches an already existing culture,[19] in recent decades literary critics have moved towards using literature as a vehicle for analyzing and interrogating the circulation of power. For professors affiliated with the feminist or postcolonial schools of theory, literature is a subtle

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[19] This argument may be found in Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (1994).

articulation of disciplinary knowledge: while it may not control whether or not someone eats, it controls the forms of knowledge to which they have access. Media is yet another tool that a sovereign entity can use to control populations, as dictatorships throughout history can attest; conversely, oppressed populations can use forms of media, including literature, to attempt to shift the balance of power in their favor.

In recent decades, the interconnectedness of the global market has spawned an increased interest in world literature, including a lively debate surrounding the word's definition. If we take "world literature" to mean the sum of all literature in the world, the term becomes effectively useless, so most critics have used the term to describe a framework for the interpretation of literature. David Damrosch provides a useful working definition: "A work enters into world literature by a double process: first, by being read *as* literature; second, by circulating out into a broader world beyond its linguistic and cultural point of origin" (Damrosch 6). For Damrosch, world literature is an act rather than a corpus—literature is only *world literature* when it is in the act of circulation. Pascale Casanova describes a system for the circulation of power not unlike Foucault's; she depicts the terrain of world literature as a site of struggle, with a powerful "center" and a disenfranchised "periphery" (terms borrowed from world-systems analysis). Under Casanova's framework, nations compete through individual authors for literary prestige and access to the literary "center," and it is this act that creates the terrain that we call "world literature." Other critics have contested or critiqued the concept of world literature in creative ways: for instance, Pheng Cheah's exploration of the "world" in world literature (2016), or Emily Apter's effort to reveal the limitations and pitfalls of the concept (2013), or Lisa's Lowe's work on reading 18th-century literature through the

paradigm of an expanding Anglo-American empire (2015). Although many theorists provide frameworks that are worthy of examination, due to space and time constraints, I will only be able to explore the work of Pascale Casanova, Debjani Ganguly, David Damrosch, and Joseph Slaughter in depth.

The models of Casanova, Ganguly, and Damrosch each contributed to the development of my own model of world literature; here I will briefly outline their respective contributions and their relationship to each other, providing a more detailed analysis of each further below. Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters* (2007) provides a world-systems analysis model for understanding literary relationships between nations, with a defined literary "center" and "periphery," creating fruitful ground for postcolonialist interventions. Debjani Ganguly's critique of Casanova, "Global Literary Refractions" (2008), provides one such intervention, complicating Casanova's unidirectional model of literary influence wherein peripheral nations can only literarily influence each other *through* the literary "center." Ganguly offers a model in which postcolonial nations can converse directly with each other through literature, creating a more nuanced world-systems model. David Damrosch proposes that we view world literature as a cultural encounter, a "mode of reading" (Damrosch 281) rather than a set of texts. In all three of these models, world literature is more than the sum of a set of global texts; it is a system, an action, and a happening wherein different national and transnational literatures encounter each other.

Casanova's work is rooted in a set of assumptions about nationalism that are most clearly revealed by Benedict Anderson's work on the historical development of nationalism as an ideology. Anderson argues that the modern nation-state came to exist

largely through the dissemination of novels. Before the invention of the printing press, Anderson asserts, there were no nation-states. France was under central political control, but its citizens would not have identified as French; there was no single French language that could be spoken across the empire of France and no concept of a shared culture. The advent of print-capitalism in the 18th century led to the invention and proliferation of new genres, such as newspapers and novels, that could be disseminated across the nation to maximize profit, and this dissemination led in turn to an imagined national unity as men and women across France (and England, and Spain, and more nations to follow) came to participate in a shared language and a shared narrative.

Casanova's examination of world literature (or as she refers to it, "the world republic of letters") takes as a given that the nationalism described by Anderson has stayed largely intact since its inception in 18th-century Western Europe. Casanova argues that modern literature has always been a struggle for supremacy between nation-states, with literatures from the periphery (largely postcolonial literatures) fighting for recognition from the literary capitals of powerful nations. Casanova's fundamental insight is that literary value is not generated on a level playing field; a work accumulates more international value from being published and well-received in Paris than from being published and well-received in Hyderabad or Beijing. According to Casanova's model, the only way for an author from a peripheral nation to attain a wide audience and global recognition is to be sanctified by a literary capital and published in a major literary language:

> For texts that come from literarily disinherited countries, the magical
> transmutation that consecration brings about amounts to a change in their

very nature: a passage from literary inexistence to existence, from invisibility to the condition of literature—a transformation that I have called *littérisation*. (127)

Literary centers, which are the cosmopolitan capitals of imperial powers such as London, Paris, and New York, have the power to create literary value or, conversely, to deny literary legitimacy to those on the periphery.

Similarly, under Casanova's model, only these centers have access to "literary modernity"; their global dominance frees them "in relation to political and national institutions" (87) and allows them to experiment with formalism. Casanova argues that the periphery's access to literary modernity works on a sort of time delay, with aesthetic developments in the literary center trickling towards the periphery. Casanova calls this concept "central time," and notes that it is a means of domination:

The recognition of central time as the only legitimate measure of political and artistic achievement is an effect of the domination exercised by the powerful; but it is a domination that is recognized and accepted by outsiders while remaining wholly unknown to the inhabitants of the centers, who are also (and especially) unaware of their role in producing literary time and its associated unit of historical measure. (93-4)

Only literature from the center can claim contemporaneity, just as only literature from the center can claim to be cosmopolitan; literature from the periphery must necessarily be national, and must argue for its inclusion in cosmopolitan spaces rather than experimenting with formalism: "Within deprived spaces, writers are condemned, in effect, to develop a national and popular theme: they must defend and illustrate national

history and controversies, if only by criticizing them" (191). Under Casanova's model, the literary center is so dominant that peripheral literatures may only gain global prestige through an appeal to the center, rather than through other peripheral nations.

Using Casanova's framework, in which national literatures battle for supremacy and recognition on the global stage, it becomes even easier to see how literature circulates as a form of power. Casanova argues that literary power does not necessarily correlate with economic or political power (although it often can); rather, it operates as its own form of capital. Like other forms of capital, it is concentrated in formerly colonial nations. As Casanova notes, any assertion that the literary landscape is fundamentally unfair is undercut by romanticized depictions of global literature:

> [T]his immense realm, a hundred times surveyed yet always ignored, has remained invisible because it rests on a fiction accepted by all who take part in the game: the fable of an enchanted world, a kingdom of pure creation, the best of all possible worlds where universality reigns through liberty and inequality… In thrall to the notion of literature as something pure, free, and universal, the contestants of literary space refuse to acknowledge the actual functioning of its peculiar economy (Casanova 12).

One strength of Casanova's approach is that it is easy to measure the success of a literary language using her methodology. Casanova offers a potential unit of measurement for determining the literariness ("the power, prestige, and volume of linguistic and literary capital") of language: "not in terms of the number of writers and readers it has, but in terms of the number of cosmopolitan intermediaries---publishers, editors, critics, and

especially translators---who assure the circulation of texts into the language or out of it" (21). According to Casanova's model, a literary language derives its power from its cosmopolitanism, its ability to cross borders and infiltrate new territory.

Although Casanova's model of a competitive literary ecosystem has proven useful and influential, in her review "Global literary refractions: Reading Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters* in the post-Cold War era" (2008), Debjani Ganguly criticizes Casanova's approach for its "inability to theorize [French and English's] world status except through dependence on a 19th-century language model" (Ganguly 256). Ganguly invokes Hardt and Negri's concept of the network, arguing that Casanova's model privileges nation-states over multi-nodal international systems. Ganguly's critique suggests an alternate model wherein former colonies can communicate in a common language without using Paris or London as an intermediary.

While Casanova's approach privileges an author's nation of origin above all else, Ganguly's model, like Hardt and Negri's, makes space for migration, contamination, and hybridity. Under Casanova's model, V.S. Naipaul begins as a Trinidadian who moves towards Englishness through the act of assimilation: he is "an outstanding example of a writer who wholly embraced the dominant literary values of his linguistic region; who, in the absence of any literary tradition in his native country, had no other choice but to try to become English" (Casanova 209). Even within Casanova's own analysis, the act of pigeonholing V.S. Naipaul's "native country" becomes incredibly complex:

> The absence of a literary and cultural tradition peculiar to Trinidad that he could claim for himself and build upon, and the impossibility of ever fully identifying himself with India, from which he was separated by two

generations and thousands of miles, made Naipaul the sorrowful

personification of dual exile. (210)

Casanova's Naipaul is suspended between three nationalities and traditions—Indian,

English, and Trinidadian—unable to fully claim any.

Ganguly critiques this depiction, arguing that "[t]here is no mention of

[Naipaul's] multiple cultural and literary inheritances that spread across a

transcontinental arc from the Caribbean to the Indian subcontinent" (Ganguly 258).

Where Casanova views Naipaul as impoverished, Ganguly views him as enriched by

three vibrant literary and cultural traditions. The idea that nation-states produce a single,

unified body of literature fails to take into account the transnational structures explored

by Hardt and Negri, as well as patterns of migration and diaspora that make it difficult to

ascribe a single nationality to many works. For instance, while Casanova classifies

Salman Rushdie as an Indian author, he has spent the majority of his life in England and

the United States; however, many of his notable works take place entirely in India. Yaa

Gyasi is a Ghanaian-American author and a Stanford graduate, and her novel *Homegoing*

takes place in both Ghana and the United States. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is Nigerian

by nationality, but she graduated from an American university and divides her time

between the two countries, as does the protagonist of her novel *Americanah.* How, then,

are we to classify these authors' novels by nationality?

In addition, Ganguly criticizes Casanova's conception of literature as

prohibitively narrow, confined to "imaginative works in print" (258), and she observes

that despite the global scope of Casanova's project, it does not account for the wealth of

literary traditions that preceded 19th-century Europe:

What is ironical is that Casanova's avowedly historicist tracing of the 'invention' of the idea of 'literature' in mid-18th century Europe does not make her own analysis of literary capital in the late twentieth century historically nuanced, complex and inclusive enough to account for the diversity and amplitude of past and contemporary literary practices (258).

This criticism highlights an invisible assumption of Casanova's: that in order to qualify as "literary" a work must fit certain *generic* constraints, only one of these constraints being that the work must appear in print. By paying attention to genre, we can account for the exclusion of rich Arabic, Chinese, and Indian traditions (among others) in Casanova's historical model. Casanova's survey of "literature" is really a history of the proliferation of and adaptation of Western genres, including the novel, a genre whose roots date to the moment of 19th-century European nationalism that Casanova cites as the origin of modern literature.

Casanova describes a top-down process through which postcolonial works are sanctified in literary capitals that relies upon the existence of one or more stable literary centers. As Ganguly notes, this perspective is one-sided, and ignores the rich wealth that Anglophone and Francophone literatures have received from an infusion of postcolonial literature:

It is important to remember that the postcolonial phase of literary internationalism did not just bring literary cultures of the ex-colonies into alignment with those of the metropolitan French and British traditions. It was not just a process that allowed hitherto 'pre-literate' cultures access to 'literary' wealth of European civilization. It was a phase of vigorous

exchange and challenge, albeit often on unequal ground, that irrevocably

transformed the world literary space. It generated seismic geocultural

shifts and questioned the very foundations of European literary canon-

making by catapulting onto the world stage diverse modalities of literary

creativity—textual, oral, and performative—some of which had traditions

that went far back in antiquity. (254)

As with Naipaul, where Casanova sees impoverishment, Ganguly sees a wealth of

creative development. Indeed, one could argue, counter to Casanova's model, that during

the experimentation and rapid development of literature during the postcolonial phase,

modernity was actually advancing from the postcolonial periphery towards the

metropolitan capitals that Casanova has deemed the literary center—which begs the

question of whether postcolonial literature can be said to be a periphery at all.

At times, Casanova seems to suggest such an interpretation herself. Her chapter

"The Small Literatures" begins with the following meditation:

Literary space is not an immutable structure, fixed once and for all in its

hierarchies and power relations. But even if the unequal distribution of

literary resources assures that such forms of domination will endure, it is

also a source of incessant struggle, of challenges to authority and

legitimacy, of rebellions, insubordination, and, ultimately, revolutions that

alter the balance of literary power and rearrange existing hierarchies. In

this sense, the only genuine history of literature is one that describes the

revolts, assaults upon authority, manifestos, inventions of new forms and

languages---all the subversions of the traditional order that, little by little,

work to create literature and the literary world. (Casanova 175)

In earlier chapters Casanova clearly states that "[T]he great heroes of literature invariably

emerge only in association with the specific power of an autonomous and international

literary capital" (109), measures the value of their contributions in terms of formalist

innovation, and posits that they are the keepers of literary contemporaneity; however, in

the above passage she presents an inverted version of her own model wherein literary

historical time is driven forward by the periphery's assaults on the center. Within

Casanova's model, another more radical model emerges.

Accordingly, there is no need to throw out Casanova's model wholesale. We can

acknowledge, for instance, that Salman Rushdie's receipt of the Booker Prize and success

in the western literary market has had an enormous effect on his international reputation

without descending into irredeemable Eurocentrism. The top-down process to which

Casanova ascribes the creation of literary value does exist. However, it is important to

recognize that this process of top-down generation is but one of many patterns of

production, consumption, and circulation that move through the world of literature like

weather patterns. We could imagine the dissemination of world literature from Western

literary capitals as a set of particularly strong and stable currents, but far from the only

factor determining the world's climate. This metaphor is neatly demonstrated by a

passage from Hardt and Negri, which Ganguly quotes:

[T]here are two faces to globalization. On one face, Empire spreads

globally its network of hierarchies and divisions that maintain order

through new mechanisms of control and constant conflict. Globalization,

however, is also the creation of new circuits of cooperation and collaboration that stretch across nations and continents and allow an unlimited number of encounters. (Hardt and Negri xiii)

The general takeaway should be not to overestimate the impact of any single distribution pattern, trade route, hierarchy, or metropolitan capital in the era of post-Cold War globalization. This principle precludes treating the West (or any other region) as a single, totalizing arbiter of literary value.

However, it does not preclude recognizing the novel's origins as a bourgeois Western genre. In *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), Ian Watt dates the appearance of the novel to early 18th century Europe, tied to the appearance of an educated, literate leisure class. While the novel has spread to all corners of the earth, its economic constraints have proven more difficult to transcend; to this day, novels are written exclusively by people with the education and time to write novels. The pattern of distribution of authors and readers demonstrates the existence of a global cosmopolitan elite that has penetrated nearly every nation. For example, Nigeria has produced a diverse and talented set of internationally-acclaimed authors, including Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Helon Habila, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, yet according to UNESCO the adult literacy rate in Nigeria was 59.57% in 2015 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics). Educated Nigerian authors win international prizes while 40% of the population remains unable to read the works that they produce, a statistic indicative of Nigeria's extreme income inequality. Kenyan author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o turned away from the genre of the novel, instead

choosing to compose theatrical productions in Gikuyu, his mother tongue, so that they would be accessible to his illiterate countrymen.[20]

The examination of the novel as a genre is made more urgent by the proliferation of new, technology-enabled genres including radio and film, and more recently, digital formats such as webcomics, YouTube videos, and short-form journalism published through digital platforms. Some of these formats—radio serials, podcasts, and YouTube video monologues—recall oral storytelling, while others—viral text posts and memes— recall ancient conceptions of authorship, with multiple individuals informally collaborating on retelling or remixing a particular story or trope. These new genres reveal the novel, a genre born of bourgeois capitalist modernity, in stark relief. They demonstrate how a genre can privilege a particular population of creators and consumers; just as fluency in the genre of the novel was determined by a level of economic security and access to Western education, fluency in these new genres requires access to the internet.

The production of a novel requires a printing press and widespread literacy; while at one point this was a significant hurdle for impoverished societies, the novel has now spread to become nearly universal. Since its adoption by postcolonial authors, the novel

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[20] A Ngũgĩ-inspired critique of Casanova might argue that the literiness of a language need not solely be defined by its participation in the "literary" genres sanctioned by the West. According to Casanova's metric, ephemeral productions staged by Ngũgĩ would carry no literary value unless they were written and then read by non-native speakers of Gikuyu, and indeed Casanova's designation of literary impoverishment does not take into account a nation's oral tradition: "Like many European countries during the nineteenth century, the newly decolonized countries had often inherited languages having no real literary existence, associated instead with extensive oral traditions" (80). Under Casanova's model, the rich oral traditions of Nigeria have a potential or virtual value that is only fully realized when they are transcribed into written Western genres. In addition, Casanova's model excludes epics that predate the novel form, including literary masterpieces such as *The Epic of Gilgamesh* or the *Mahābāhrata*.

has undergone several transformational and tectonic shifts, as postcolonial authors have creatively subverted or transcended novelistic conventions inherited from the novel's bourgeois Western inventors.

The proliferation of new, technology-dependent genres lends more urgency to an examination of the novel, not less. As we leap forward into a sea of new genres, most of which will privilege those with technological access, it is imperative that we attune ourselves to the ways in which genres include and exclude, and what it means for a work to be considered "universal." When I write of "the cosmopolitan novel," there are two types of cosmopolitanism at play: the cosmopolitanism of rapidly evolving societies embedded within a turbulent global economy, and the cosmopolitanism of literature that crosses borders and addresses multiple audiences. As the novel flourishes in tandem with capitalist middle classes in peripheral nations, postcolonial novelists must position their work between assimilation and rebellion on multiple axes. While the adoption of the novel form is an act of assimilation, within the genre of the novel there is potential for radical rebellion; this dissertation examines when, and how, postcolonial novelists rebel against the constraints of their genre.

The opening chapters of David Damrosch's *What Is World Literature* (2003) examine the cosmopolitan reading practices of Goethe and the rediscovery and translation of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. This focus on the 19th century is a welcome counterpoint to the breathless contemporaneity of theorists like Debjani Ganguly, while a meditation on the text of the *Epic* itself—originally Sumerian, but retold and rewritten by the Babylonians and later the Akkadians—challenges narratives that locate world

literature exclusively within modernity. For Damrosch, world literature is not new, and neither is globalization.

Damrosch provides a flexible, threefold definition of world literature:

1. *World literature is an elliptical refraction of national literatures.*

2. *World literature is writing that gains in translation.*

3. *World literature is not a set canon of texts but a mode of reading:*
   a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place
   and time. (Damrosch 281)

Damrosch proposes that we recognize world literature as an act or relation rather than a set of texts. We can imagine the action that is "world literature," the action of reading a work outside of its original context, as an ellipsis stretched between two points, defined both by the cultural context that produced the work and the culture that now consumes it. Within Damrosch's model, the culture that reads and interprets a work is a second authorial presence, co-creating the work as world literature. When transposed from one cultural context to another, any work, regardless of its language of origin, becomes a work in translation.

Unlike Casanova's model, Damrosch's model is nonhierarchical. Whereas Casanova's world literature is mediated through Western metropolitan capitals, within Damrosch's model it is only necessary for two cultures to be in conversation for world literature to emerge. This allows for the existence of a multiplicity of world literatures, and by extension a multiplicity of worlds. Indeed, Damrosch combats the idea that there could be one literature; in his analysis of Chinese poet Bei Dao, who has been accused of writing for a Western audience, Damrosch notes, "Far from being a rootless

cosmopolitan, Bei Dao is doubly or multiply linked to events and audiences at home and abroad; indeed, as an exile since the early nineties, he has occupied an increasingly multiple relation to the very terms 'home' and 'abroad'" (22). While Casanova's model left no space for exiles and expats, demanding that we categorize them as belonging to a single homeland, Damrosch provides an answer for how we should characterize a Rushdie or a Gyasi. They are not allied with a single nation, but nor are they the citizen of some vague and neutral "world." Rather, they have multiple allegiances and must be multiply located as authors of India *and* England, Ghana *and* America.

While Damrosch does not dwell on the vicissitudes of the global literary market in great length, he does mention their impact on the landscape of world literature, noting that "[e]ven today, foreign works will rarely be translated at all in the United States, much less widely distributed, unless they reflect American concerns and fit comfortably with American images of the foreign culture in question" (18). My project will complicate Damrosch's model by recognizing contemporary "world literature" as both a cultural encounter *and* an economic encounter. As Casanova states "the power of international commerce… in transforming the conditions of production, modifies the form of books themselves" (Casanova 171-2). When we examine the global economy and its role in forming contemporary literature, we reveal a more complete picture of the cultural and economic encounters of which globalization is comprised.

Literary and Economic Man

In *The World Republic of Letters* Casanova calls our attention to the intersection between economic globalization and world literature:

Bestsellers, of course, have always sold across borders. What is new today

is the manufacture and promotion of a certain type of novel aimed at an

international market… The rise of multinational conglomerates and the

very broad diffusion of internationally popular novels that give the

appearance of literariness have called into question the very idea of a

literature independent of commercial forces. (171-2)

As Casanova notes above, world literature is profoundly influenced by global economy. If we examine world literature without noting the economic conditions that gave rise to it, we are only seeing part of the picture.

Economists have also noted the link between culture and the economy. As early as 1890, Alfred Marshall warned against economic models that ignored the cultural and social dimension of life, decrying economists who "construct an abstract science with regard to the actions of an 'economic man' who is under no ethical influences and who pursues pecuniary gain… mechanically and selfishly" (Marshall x). The economic man that Marshall describes is a rational agent who uses resources efficiently and dispassionately, advocating for his own self-interest. Until the fairly recent development of the field of behavioral economics, economic models were usually concocted with this economic man in mind. As Marshall notes, economists have contradictory expectations for this "economic man"; he always acts out of individual self-interest, but nevertheless follows through on every contractual obligation and never distorts the market through cheating.

Marshall was responding to economists such as Léon Walras, who in his 1874 work *Elements of Pure Economics* argued that the forces of supply and demand

eventually produce a general equilibrium in the market in which supply and demand are perfectly matched. For Walras, the interaction of supply and demand is as independent from human behavior as pure math; in fact, as he argues "[a]ssuming equilibrium, we may even go so far as to abstract from entrepreneurs and simply consider the productive services as being, in a certain sense, exchanged directly for one another" (Walras 225). If market forces are natural laws, like gravity, then they can be examined independently from the humans who are doing the buying and selling. In Walras' model, all men are the proverbial "economic man."

Over a century later, in a reflection upon the shortcomings of Walrasian economics, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis cite empirical data from the field of behavioral economics that disproves the existence of this "economic man." One of the games they adduce, the ultimatum game, aims to measure the ethical obligations felt between two strangers:

> The ultimatum game pairs subjects (usually anonymously) one being randomly designated the "responder," the other the "proposer." The proposer is provisionally awarded a sum of money with instructions to divide it between proposer and responder. If the responder accepts the offer, the responder gets the proposed portion, and the proposer keeps the rest. (Bowles and Gintis 1415)

If two "economic men" were to participate in this game, the results would play out as follows: the proposer would divide the money unevenly, allotting to the responder only a very small sum; the responder would accept the deal, on the grounds that receiving something is better than receiving nothing. In practice, however, most proposers offer

between 40% to 50% of the sum, and offers of less than 30% are most often rejected by the responder, resulting in both participants gaining nothing. Clearly, "economic man" is an insufficient model for predicting human behavior. Nevertheless, and in spite of the complications presented by the relatively recent field of behavioral economics, the "economic man" remains a dominant figure, particularly in circles where the virtue of the free market is most evangelically extolled.

In contrast, English departments are dominated by the figure of the literary character, who can be a psychological subject or a genre-based type. Literary characters, particularly those in novels, differ from the "economic man" of Walrasian economics in nearly every conceivable way. By their nature, these characters are conflicted, particularly the psychological subjects. Their desires are opposed by internal or external forces, usually both. While the desires of "economic man" are calculable and can be reduced to discrete quantities, the desires of literary characters are not only incalculable but are often unknown, even to the characters themselves: the final scene of Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011) reveals the protagonist's ignorance about his own characterization as he encounters a wildly dissonant image of himself. Because the desires of "economic man" are calculable, he is rarely conflicted; however, as Neel Mukherjee's *The Lives of Others* (2014) demonstrates, humans are ruled by obligations to others that often come into conflict. All of the aspects of humanity that make for compelling, dramatic literature are precisely those that thwart simple neoclassical economic models of human behavior. As Damrosch notes, we are multiply located upon many axes of identity. Our economic selves cannot be excised cleanly from our multitude of cultural and collective identities that demand that we act beyond our own self-interest.

Human Rights and the Individual

Whereas Casanova, Ganguly, and Damrosch all examine world literature broadly defined, in *Human Rights Inc.* (2007) Joseph Slaughter confines himself to a single literary form: that of the *Bildungsroman*, one of the world's most examined novel forms. Slaughter argues that the *Bildungsroman* works in tandem with human rights law to privilege the concept of personhood:

> The novel genre and liberal human rights discourse are more than coincidentally, or casually, interconnected. Seen through the figure and formula of human personality development central to both the *Bildungsroman* and human rights, their shared assumptions and imbrications emerge to show clearly their historical, formal, and ideological interdependencies. They are mutually enabling fictions: each projects an image of the human personality that ratifies the other's idealistic visions of the proper relations between the individual and society and the normative career of free and full personality development. (Slaughter 4)

Not only does Slaughter argue that the *Bildungsroman* privileges a set of ideas about identity and personhood, but he argues that the *Bildungsroman* is structurally an argument for human rights. His reading of Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* argues that a key goal of the text is to argue that human rights, traditionally the province of the "bourgeois white male citizen" (ibid.), should extend to the protagonist, and by extension to Zimbabwean girls. The *Bildungsroman* argues that its protagonist is a

person, a term that Slaughter distinguishes from the term "human" through its relationship to a set of universal rights and duties:

> [Personality] is not the name of individual, irreducible difference but of sameness, the collection of common modalities of the human being's extension into the civil and social order. 'Personality' is a technical term that means the quality of being equal before the law—to put it tautologically, the quality of being a person." (17)

The ability to claim "common modalities" depends upon a commonly accepted set of universal values. Slaughter's examination of novel structure reveals that novels assert the rights and duties of the individual and his/her relationship to society through both their structure and their content.

Slaughter characterizes the *Bildungsroman* as a genre that mediates between the individual and the state via a set of predetermined formulas: "The generic elements of this narrative consist of two primary actors (the human and the state), a probable conflict between them, a means of remediation in the human personality, and a temporal trajectory that emplots a transition narrative of the human being's sociopolitical incorporation into the regime of rights and citizenship" (90). For Slaughter, the novel takes place in the gap between two irreconcilable truths: the individual is entitled to universal rights, and individuals do not universally possess the rights to which they are entitled. The *Bildungsroman* reconciles these two truths by beginning with one and ending with the other: while separated in time, both truths coexist peacefully within the same work.

Although at the *Bildungsroman*'s beginning the protagonist is without the ability to claim universality, over the course of a *Bildungsroman* the protagonist is incorporated into the universal order. Slaughter calls this "the process of becoming positively what one already is by natural right" (98). The *Bildungsroman* derives its power as a genre from its ability to hold the paradoxical relationship between universality and particularity in productive tension with itself.

Yet Slaughter's justifiably acclaimed exploration of human rights and literature conflates two concepts: the Enlightenment's *droits de l'homme* and the far younger concept of human rights. In *The Last Utopia* (2010), Samuel Moyn argues that the discourse of human rights emerged in the 1940s and did not become a major player on the political stage until the 1970s. Moyn notes that the Enlightenment concept of rights was tied to the rights of citizenship, whereas "human rights" as we understand them transcend the apparatus of the state: "True, rights have long existed, but they were from the beginning part of the authority of the state, not invoked to transcend it. They were most visible in revolutionary nationalism through modern history—until 'human rights' displaced revolutionary nationalism" (Moyn 7). For Moyn, contemporary human rights is distinguished from its predecessors by its transnationality, "the recasting of rights as entitlements that might contradict the sovereign nation-state from above and outside rather than serve as its foundation" (13). This conception is reminiscent of the transnational structures that Hardt and Negri argue hold power in a globalized, capitalist world; in fact, the primary enforcers of human rights are transnational organizations like the United Nations (Hardt and Negri's first tier) and NGOs like Amnesty International (their third tier).

Not coincidentally, the discourse of human rights rose to prominence alongside

another dominant ideology: free market economics. In the 1950s, the free market

ideology of economists at the University of Chicago came to be known collectively as the

Chicago school of economics. While in the 1950s Keynesianism was mainstream, the

Chicago school gained prominence throughout the 70s; one of its major advocates,

Milton Friedman, won the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1976, and his ideas continue to

be hugely influential in the creation of economic policy.[21] Naomi Klein notes that

Chicago economists supported oppressive South American juntas with neoliberal

economic policies. The term "human rights," which separates political and economic

policy, allowed economists to claim the economic successes of these juntas while

ignoring the human rights atrocities that they committed. Organizations like Amnesty

International arose to document the human rights abuses, but ignored the context of the

economic system that these abuses were supporting: "Just as the Chicago economists had

nothing to say about the torture (it had nothing to do with their areas of expertise), the

human rights groups had little to say about the radical transformations taking place in the

economic sphere (it was beyond their narrow legal purview)" (Klein 154). Like the *droits*

de l'homme that came before it, human rights discourse focused on violations against

individual persons while failing to examine the unjust systems that created those

violations. As Klein notes:

> Scrubbed clean of references to the rich and the poor, the weak and strong,
>
> the North and the South, this way of explaining the world, so popular in
>
> North America and Europe, simply asserted that everyone has the right to

---

[21] For an overview of the Chicago school's rise, see Harvey (2005) and Klein (2007).

a fair trial and to be free from cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. It

didn't ask why, it just asserted *that*. (150)

We can reframe this criticism within the context of Foucauldian biopower: while the

discourse of human rights is effective for criticizing early forms of sovereignty, the

ruler's ability to "let live and make die," it is an imprecise instrument for measuring how

contemporary sovereignty *makes* live and *lets* die. As a result, contemporary biopower

manifests as the appropriation of human rights discourse in service of the free market.

Over the latter half of the 20th century, human rights discourse and free market

economics emerged as the twin faces of globalization. While human rights discourse was

often harnessed in service of the global economic order, it also could also be a useful tool

for the criticism of capital and its effects. As David Harvey observes in *A Brief History of*

Neoliberalism (2005):

> [The] appeal to the universalism of rights is a double-edged sword. It may
>
> and can be used with progressive aims in mind. The tradition that is most
>
> spectacularly represented by Amnesty International, Médecins sans
>
> Frontières, and others cannot be dismissed as a mere adjunct of neoliberal
>
> thinking. (Harvey 178)

My aim here is not to disavow human rights discourse wholesale, but to acknowledge it

as a powerful force for good that nevertheless in its current iteration can be leveraged by

the wealthy and powerful to avoid meaningful change. The discourse of human rights

offered liberalism the ability to divorce human rights abuses from their economic and

political contexts and led to a new strain of multicultural liberalism that advocated for

diversity, inclusion, and civil rights for all—but not at the price of questioning the

economic and political system that mediated access to those rights. This dynamic is clearly illustrated by the Pepsi commercial scandal of 2017.

The controversy arose when Pepsi aired a commercial (PepsiCo) starring Kendall Jenner, one of the Kardashians, in which Americans of various ethnic and racial backgrounds protest joyfully, dancing in the street and waving signs that say "Peace" and "Join the conversation." Kendall Jenner is inspired to join the march and to give a Pepsi to a cop, to the loud approval of an adoring multi-ethnic audience, including a hijabi photographer who is inspired to photograph the encounter. When this commercial was released, the activist community immediately recognized it for what it was: the aesthetic form of activism without the content. The protesters in the Pepsi commercial aren't protesting for or against anything; they are engaging with the *aesthetics* of diversity and political engagement, and all at the service of a multinational corporation. In this commercial, the Western capitalist order mimics the same strategies that arose from the left to critique it. Multicultural liberalism serves global capital, recalling Hardt and Negri's observation that "theorists who advocate for a politics of… hybridity… have been outflanked by the strategies of power" (138).

This vapid aesthetic parody of human rights activism is the natural consequence for a discourse that has become so universally accepted within the Western liberal hegemonic order that its adherents no longer feel the need to defend its first principles, or even to state explicitly what those principles are. As the first director of the United Nations Human Rights Division once stated, "Everyone knows, or should know, why human rights are important" (Slaughter 2). Human rights are evoked reflexively, as a concept as transparent and self-evident as goodness.

31

However, through his study of the novel's relationship to human rights, Slaughter

reveals that both human rights and the novel genre advance a set of implicit values. Far

from being a transparent vehicle for self-evident truths, the novel genre carries a set of

assumptions about the individual's relationship to the state and to the world at large. As

Ian Watt explains,

> The novel's serious concern with the daily lives of ordinary people seems
>
> to depend upon two important general conditions: the society must value
>
> every individual highly enough to consider him the proper subject of its
>
> serious literature; and there must be enough variety of belief and action
>
> among ordinary people for a detailed account of them to be of interest to
>
> other ordinary people, the readers of novels. It is probable that neither of
>
> these conditions for the existence of the novel were obtained very widely
>
> until fairly recently, because they both depend on the rise of a society
>
> characterized by that vast complex of interdependent factors denoted by
>
> the term 'individualism.' (Watt 60)

Watt identifies the significance and uniqueness of the ordinary individual as one of the

novel's most recognizable traits, and notes that it is only possible in a society that highly

values ordinary citizens as individuals. It will be useful, then, to observe the subsection of

novels that decenter individualism as a guiding tenet.

Individualism is a culturally specific ideology based on specific assumptions

about the division between the public and the private. Slaughter's model privileges the

Bildungsroman because it assumes a correlation between the individual and human

rights; however, as Harvey notes, the concept of universal rights is not inherently

individualistic: "There is a battle to be fought, not only over which universals and what rights should be invoked in particular situations but also over how universal principles and conceptions of rights should be constructed" (Harvey 179). In the current, most universally circulated iteration of human rights discourse, "Neoliberal concern for the individual trumps any social democratic concern for equality, democracy, and social solidarities… Legal decisions tend to favour rights of private property and the profit rate over rights of equality and social justice" (176-7). Conversely, it is possible to imagine human rights in more collective terms. Thus in cultures where individualism appears with the free market, the novel may construct human rights in ways that do not require the *Bildungsroman*. Rather than following a single protagonist and his or her arrival at self-realization, many postcolonial novels, such as those presented here, follow the development of communities.

While it is standard for a novel to have a single protagonist, some postcolonial novels either decenter their protagonist or refuse to have a protagonist altogether. Neither Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) nor Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* (2013) offers a single clear protagonist, instead following all of the characters in a family. In Abdelrahman Munif's *Cities of Salt* (1987), no single character is focused upon throughout the entirety of the novel; the novel is instead grounded in following the development of a particular village and how it is impacted by globalization over several generations. Similarly, Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* (2016) traces a family over the course of seven generations and multiple continents. All of these novels are engaged in a radical attempt to decenter the individual within a genre that arose to mediate the relationship between the individual and the state under Western capitalism.

Slaughter observes the novel genre's symbiotic relationship with the rights of the individual; as I will demonstrate, the rise of human rights discourse and multicultural liberalism has altered the way that this relationship is marketed and sold to a reading public. To expand upon Hardt and Negri's observations, it is not enough for literary critics to advocate for a politics of hybridity. We must seek out literature that critiques systemic injustice, and advocate for strategies of transformation and resistance within the novel genre.

Subverting the *Bildungsroman* Model

This dissertation engages with the concept of world literature by focusing on literatures from the developing world within the context of contemporary economic globalization. I offer a methodology for reading based upon Slaughter's observation that novels are uniquely suited to attempt to reconcile, or at least make sense of, the tensions and contradictions which compose modernity (i.e. the tension between the particular and the universal). However, I expand upon Slaughter's argument by examining capitalism and nationalism as living ideologies that are constantly in flux, morphing to compete with both postmodern globalist ideologies and pre-modern, pre-capitalist social formations. This dissertation examines a series of novels which contain multiple, sometimes contradictory structures for understanding the individual's relationship to the nation-state and to the world at large. These novels offer innovative forms that challenge the conventions of the *Bildungsroman* and, in some cases, the idea that a novel should have an individual protagonist at all.

In particular, this dissertation aims to elucidate the link between a novel's structure and the social formations that it reflects and depicts. The *Bildungsroman* structure rose to prominence in the 19th century to mediate relationships between individual subject-citizens and nation-states under capitalism, at a time when individual subject-citizens, nation-states, and capitalism were all relatively young concepts. In this dissertation, I examine a sequence of novels and parse through an overlapping series of kinship and community structures: pre-modern structures (such as the family), modern structures (such as the nation and the individuated subject), and structures that defy tradition and gesture towards a coming age where community is freed from geographical determinism. These new imagined communities are simultaneously local and global, as in South African author Patricia Schonstein Pinnock's novel *Skyline* (2000), which depicts a community centered around a block of apartments in Cape Town whose residents originate from Rwanda, Mozambique, Nigeria, and Germany. The communities imagined in these novels gesture towards evolution in the concepts of home, place, community, and kinship under global capitalism.

I begin with an examination of Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* (2013)*,* a novel that depicts a transgenerational and transnational community without deviating wildly from the standard novel form. *The Lowland* follows a single family over four generations as they attempt to remain a community in the face of traumatic experiences that resist both speech and narrative. While the two brothers Subhash and Udayan at first seem to suggest a simple binary choice between emigration and remaining at home, I advance a more nuanced model in which characters are multiply rooted within specific locations—an office in Los Angeles, a house in Rhode Island—and form communities that transgress

national boundaries while remaining rooted in multiple specific localities. In *The Lowland*, the spatial gap between nations is ultimately less important than the traumatic rift of the inexpressible that lies between characters.

I continue to use trauma as an interpretive lens in my second chapter on Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* (2016), a novel which follows the effects of the transatlantic slave trade across 250 years, seven generations, and two continents. In *Homegoing*, no character retains the role of "protagonist" for longer than a single chapter; each character passes down their role in the story to their descendants, and the result is a novel that follows bloodlines rather than individuals. *Homegoing* exemplifies the novel form while decentering individual subjects: the characters in *Homegoing* are not only bound by blood, but by their participation in a transgenerational, transnational trauma, the telling of which spans centuries and continents while remaining focused on intimate interactions within families. I argue that *Homegoing*'s unique structure exemplifies the novel genre's unsung ability to transcend the paradigm of the citizen and the nation-state and offers new ways to conceptualize community and belonging, de-emphasizing the individual protagonist and depicting a community which is both transnational and intimate.

My third chapter examines how global labor migration affects family dynamics in Laila Lalami's *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (2005), a novel in which several Moroccan migrants leave their families and undertake the dangerous journey across the Strait of Gibraltar into Spain. *Hope…* depicts the loss and disruption of social networks, and in doing so evokes the hidden costs of migration driven by global inequity. I argue that the novel form, through its ability to represent communities holistically, can reveal the intangible losses of labor migration that are often overshadowed by its tangible gains.

Like *Homegoing, Hope…* does not focus on a single character. Its unique structure follows four characters whose stories only intersect for a single chapter at the novel's beginning, yet throughout the remainder of the novel these characters move through a shared community formed by transnational migration and Morocco's position in the global economy.

In my fourth chapter, I investigate the novel *Skyline* (2000) by South African author Patricia Schonstein Pinnock. Published in 2000, *Skyline* captures a moment of rapid globalization as South Africa opens its economy after the end of Apartheid. The protagonist is a young white girl living with her family in a rundown apartment block predominantly populated by migrants and refugees from all over the continent. As territorial colonialism is supplanted by economic globalization, the new young state continues to fail its most vulnerable members, and the narrator grapples with the failure of state institutions through deviations from the *Bildungsroman*'s narrative structure.

In my postscript/conclusion, I write of my experience at the Open Book Festival in Cape Town which I attended in September of 2017. I explore how the form of the literary festival, like the form of the novel, is transformed by its transplantation to the global south. Through its participation in both global and local literary networks, the Open Book Festival demonstrates the folly of treating texts as individuated units—rather, like characters in a novel, texts are components of a larger network and must be understood as such. In this chapter, the forms that populate the novels I examine in this dissertation—nationalism, global capitalism, cosmopolitanism—are transplanted into and examined in the physical space of a literary festival.

Each one of these chapters examines transnational communal structures. In each case, the structures are transformed through their widely varied contexts as well as the role that nationalism and the nation-state play in each novel. My goal is to elucidate the roles these transnational structures are taking on in contemporary novels, as well as how they relate to our political and cultural reality.

While it would be fallacious to claim that individuals in the developing world were unable to critique or rebel against communal structures before the import of Western ideas about individuality, Western ideas, platforms, and genres certainly presented new avenues for resistance against communal traditions and ideals. Chinua Achebe's novels *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *No Longer at Ease* (1961) both depict individuals reacting to disruption of communal kinship structures due to colonial influence; in *No Longer at Ease* specifically, however, this disruption is tied to economic anxieties as Obi attempts to reconcile his dual identities as a Westernized individual (homo economicus) and a member of a traditional kinship community, with all the obligations that membership entails.

In some cases, increased mobility presents protagonists with new avenues for self-expression. In Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008), Balram is able to escape his communal obligations by losing himself in the teeming mass of social mobility that is urban India; in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* (2013), migration to the United States allows Guari to eschew familial obligations and craft a new life for herself. In both cases, the protagonist breaks with communal obligations through the mobility that an economically globalized world provides. However, in both cases, these communal

structures continue to exist within the novel, in the form of Balram's guilty recollections and Guari's estranged family.

Just as the model of economic man, an individual who acts purely in his or her own self-interest, is an insufficient model for understanding the complexities of human behavior, I argue that the *Bildungsroman*, a parallel literary formation that glorifies individuality, is an insufficient model for portraying the individual's role in his/her community. This dissertation will attempt to deconstruct and critique the method by which the *Bildungsroman* has historically been read; while the novels I examine may in some cases bear a passing resemblance to the *Bildungsroman* model, they subvert structural convention in ways which decenter protagonists and challenge national borders as an ordering principle. In these novels, different identity formations— including individuals, families, local communities, nations, transnational communities, and the world—compete for narrative primacy, with no single identity emerging entirely triumphant.

The *Bildungsroman* arose to mediate the individual's relationship to a world system composed of modern-states embedded in a system of global capitalism. As I demonstrate in this dissertation, contemporary postcolonial novels subvert the structure of the *Bildungsroman*, thereby offering new models for conceiving of citizenship and selfhood. In subsequent chapters I establish an alternate methodology of reading and interpretation, one which decenters individuals and nation-states and privileges communities that are capable of transcending national borders.

1.0   CHAPTER 1: THE BANYAN STRUCTURE: COMMUNITY AND 'GLOCALITY' IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S *THE LOWLAND*

There is a tendency in literature departments to classify literary works by their nation of origin. Fredric Jameson (1986) and Pascale Casanova (2004) have both proposed approaches to classifying global literature along national lines: Jameson proposes that we read "all third-world texts" as "national allegories" (Jameson 69), while Casanova argues that all literature can be viewed as a proxy war between nation-states struggling for cultural dominance. In my introduction I mentioned some of the criticisms of this position and problematized the idea of a national literature in a globalized world. But if novels are no longer in the process of building nations, as they were in 18th-century Europe, what work are contemporary novels doing? Are they still in the process of building community, and if so, what manner of community?

Like most concepts examined in isolation, "community" rewards close scrutiny by becoming ever more vague and nebulous; as Parvati Nair (2004) notes, "Widely used, frequently invoked and almost always elusive, 'community' has received numerous, often contradictory, definitions over the past decades" (Nair 5). While the word "community" implies that at least two individuals are held together by some common characteristic, the number of individuals encompassed by a community and the intensity of their bond are left unspecified; the OED provides the primary definition of "a body of people or things

viewed collectively," while also noting that community can also mean "the generality of people" or even "a commonwealth; a nation or a state" (OED, "community"). The vagueness and elasticity of "community" is instructive in reading Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* (2013), a novel in which the word rarely appears, but its definition is nevertheless always at stake.

The Lowland depicts a contemporary moment in which the model of nation and diaspora is no longer sufficient to describe lived human experience; community is, in Parvati Nair's parlance, "dislodged… from the confines of national territory, forcing nations to confront their inability to function as ultimate communities through acknowledgment and acceptance of nonterritorial transworld communities (Nair 10). Community in *The Lowland* is not defined by nationality and citizenship, nor is it tied to the idea of a universal humanity; rather, community arises through specific, local interactions that are nevertheless global in scale, that span nations and continents and oceans. These localized interactions bring into being a community that resists simple categorization upon national or familial lines, defying traditional expectations of how kinship structures should behave.

If we were to view every interaction that takes place within *The Lowland* as a dot on a map, the map would have to be global in scale, large enough to encompass the United States, India, and (briefly) Ireland. However, these dots would form constellations of specific localities to which characters are irrevocably tethered, whether through memory, family, or choice. In that sense, *The Lowland* acts as a sort of narrative reimagining of Kwame Anthony Appiah's "cosmopolitan patriot" who "can maintain the possibility of a world in which *everyone* is a rooted cosmopolitan, attached to a home of

one's own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different places that are home to other, different people" (Appiah 618). Rather than disintegrating our sense of place, *The Lowland* reveals the specificity of place in a globalized present by bringing multiple locations into conversation with each other.

In "Breaking the Boundary: Reading Lahiri's *The Lowland* as Neo-Cosmopolitan Fiction" (2015) Binod Paudyal uses the term "glocal" to describe the community imagined by *The Lowland,* where ethical imperatives, such as Udayan's revolutionary drive and Subhash's responsibility to care for his family, have interrelated local and global implications. As a commodity, *The Lowland* exhibits both global and local characteristics, even before one opens the novel to view its contents: it is the brainchild of a multiply rooted author, with ties to London, Rhode Island, Kolkata, Boston, and Rome; it was published by Random House, an American publisher with global reach, jointly owned by the German corporation Bertelsmann and the British publishing house Pearson PLC; and it has received or been nominated to receive several international awards. Symptomatic of a global literary present, *The Lowland* is multiply rooted on nearly every axis imaginable. Following in Appiah's footsteps, I read *The Lowland* as a cosmopolitan novel, with "glocality" acting as a defining feature of its rooted cosmopolitanism.

The *Bildungsroman* model for analyzing literature, as proposed by Joseph Slaughter and others, would suggest that we examine the characters in *The Lowland* as individuated subjects who come to terms with their identities as subjects of human rights. Slaughter (2007) argues that these human rights are granted by one's status as citizen of a nation-state; however, for a novel as multiply rooted as *The Lowland*, national citizenship seems an insufficient model for describing the set of rights and obligations that define the

characters' journeys, which, I argue, are rooted more strongly in the characters' identities as members of a *community* than as individual subjects.

I therefore propose that we take the novel on its own terms, viewing it not as the story of an individual's relationship to society, but as the story of a community, fractured and transcontinental and often out of contact but nevertheless interconnected. When we accept that *The Lowland* is not the story of a set of individuals, but the story of disjointed attempts to form a coherent community among members of a family, the novel's structure begins to make sense: the characters cannot always see how, or why, their individual perspectives are part of a greater, narratively and thematically interrelated whole. Therefore we should not read *The Lowland* as an individual's journey capable of conveying greater truths about the nature of community; rather, as I argue, we should read it as a narrative of a fractured community which can, in its telling, reveal truths about individual agency by interrogating the boundary between the communities we are born into and the communities we choose.

Migration as Collective Trauma

Like the citizens of Anderson's imagined community, the characters in *The Lowland* may never meet each other but are nevertheless imaginatively interconnected through a shared narrative of trauma. We might understand this through Kai Erikson's definition of collective trauma, as described in his essay "Notes on Trauma and Community" (1991): "a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality" (459). *The Lowland* is not the story of a single individual's journey to a greater understanding of her

place in society; rather, it is the story of a traumatized community struggling to find an effective strategy for affiliation and integration into a global community.

To understand how this trauma concretely impacts the tissues of social life in *The Lowland*, I offer as examples two characters who live continents apart but nevertheless share an experience of solitude and disconnect from the community. When Guari, a philosophy professor living in California, injures her hand,, she is left to deal with the aftermath of the injury by herself: "There was no one to help her this time. She was dependent on the nurses, the doctors, when they came"; "Not wanting to burden anyone, but unable to manage alone, she went away" (Lahiri 346, 347). An ocean away, Guari's mother-in-law Bijoli is similarly isolated from the surrounding community: "Once she could have knocked on [her neighbors'] doors and been recognized, welcomed, treated to a cup of tea. She would have been handed an invitation to the wedding, beseeched to attend. But there are new homes now, new people who prefer their televisions, who never talk to her" (229).

These intimate moments of isolation and vulnerability are directly attributable to globalization and market forces. Were traditional structures still in place, Bijoli's family would be living in her house as she aged rather than living abroad in America. The life that Guari has chosen, the life of a single woman in a city where she has no roots, is only possible because she chose to migrate. The lonely elderly are endemic to societies where capitalism encourages mobility, where one's children will move to a city far away for the sake of a job or greater freedom. The traditional structures that used to all but ensure a built-in community—large families, compound houses, networks of people who have been neighbors for generations—no longer function when family members are

incentivized to migrate in search of economic opportunity.[22] In this sense, migration and economic globalization are in themselves forms of collective trauma.

Representing Trauma through Hybridity

The novel genre is particularly suited to the expression of collective trauma due to its hybridity. In the essay "Discourse in the Novel" from *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), Bakhtin defines hybrid constructions as a defining feature of the novel genre:

"What we are calling a hybrid construction is an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two 'languages,' two semantic and axiological belief systems. We repeat, there is no formal---compositional and syntactic---boundary between these utterances, styles, languages, belief systems; the division of voices and languages takes place within the limits of a single syntactic whole, often within the limits of a simple sentence…. As we shall see, hybrid constructions are of enormous significance in novel style." (304-5)

True to Bakhtin's model, *The Lowland* is fraught with hybrid constructions. *The Lowland* shifts between various third-person limited perspectives, with the action always communicated from the perspective of one of the characters, usually either Subhash or Guari. Within these third-person limited perspectives, dialogue provides multiple voices, with the perspective of for instance Udayan only ever conveyed through dialogue until

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[22] For more on migration's effect on the lonely elderly, see Thapa et al. (2018).

the novel's very end. While readers of novels are accustomed to navigating an array of

voices and perspectives within a single work, the structure of *The Lowland* takes

advantage of the novel's capacity for contraposing "two utterances, two speech manners,

two styles, two 'languages,' two semantic and axiological belief systems" (ibid.) by

continually decentering the reader; while the reader is at first aligned with a clear

protagonist, over the course of the novel they are encouraged to align with an ever

widening and often disconnected array of perspectives.

Part I of *The Lowland* is told entirely from the character Subhash's perspective,

with the reader only having access to information that Subhash knows. This excludes

knowledge about Subhash's brother Udayan's revolutionary activities, which are for the

most part left vague: "He traveled outside the city, he did not specify where… They did

not hear from him while he was gone" (Lahiri 37). While Subhash's perspective leaves

large blind spots over the actions and experiences of Udayan, it does provide the reader

with a single unified perspective, a character with whom they are naturally aligned. When

Subhash leaves for the United States, the reader's perspective migrates with him; our

only knowledge of what occurs in India is conveyed to us through letters from Subhash's

family. Part I ends with Subhash receiving word of the death of Udayan.

This single perspective is complicated in Part II. Part II not only introduces a new

perspective, that of Udayan's wife Guari, but also shatters the novel's linear progression

by skipping backwards in time to Guari and Udayan's courtship, well before the time of

his death. *The Lowland* capitalizes on the novel's capacity for heterogeneous structure

and hybrid constructions by non-linearly leaping between various third-person limited

perspectives. The novel continues to vacillate between Guari and Subhash's perspectives

throughout Parts I-IV; beginning with Part V, however, even this narrative structure begins to disintegrate, making space for new voices including Subhash's mother Bijoli and Guari's daughter Bela. The final word is given to Udayan, from whose perspective we learn his final sensation was a vision of Guari from early in their courtship. Linear time is warped to give the last word to the absence at the center of the novel. The plot and all subsequent events revolve around Udayan's traumatic absence, like celestial objects orbiting a black hole.

What appears at first to be a standard coming-of-age story, a migratory *Bildungsroman,* in actuality depicts a clustered community defined by Udayan's death and absence. As the novel progresses, a single narrative perspective dissolves into a diffuse cloud of interlocking narratives. Structurally, *The Lowland* encourages us to think beyond the confines of a single protagonist, creating a community brought into being by a shared traumatic experience.

Anderson famously argued that the novel genre brought the nation into being, narratively constructing a community that became realized through our collective imagination. I argue that *The Lowland* performs a similar feat for a cosmopolitan world, narratively depicting a community that extends beyond national citizenship, creating a cosmopolitan community that coheres around a shared experience. *The Lowland* takes advantage of the novel genre's hybrid constructions to depict a set of trauma-responses that are as fragmented and multifarious as the genre itself, leaping between locations and perspectives and through time to imagine how community might cohere in a world with unclear and shifting boundaries.

Structurally and ideologically, *The Lowland* creates a fragmented community bound together by absence and loss and shared trauma, large and unwieldy enough to evoke the global while remaining, from scene to scene, profoundly local. The novel does not reach a clean conclusion, and the community it depicts does not cohere in a neat and seamless way. Yet in that sense, too, it invokes a burgeoning global consciousness whose failures and shortcomings are often more visible than its successes.

Models of Community and Attitudes towards Migration

While *The Lowland* creates an imagined community, it does so through a model closer to Appiah's than Anderson's: instead of a straightforward progression towards full citizenship under a European-style nation-state, characters in *The Lowland* seek community in reference to a collection of locations and to each other as well. Rather than the clean-cut borders of the nation-state, we might take as our model the constellation, with characters in *The Lowland* rooted to sets of discrete locations scattered throughout a cosmopolitan ether. While national borders exist within *The Lowland*, other methods of affiliation proliferate, from Subhash's identification with the cosmopolitan Indian diaspora to characters' ties to particular houses or landmarks, rooted in memory. In conjunction with the way that Guari's life is lived, her Indian citizenship, which would be of supreme importance under Anderson's model, seems almost incidental, a mere formality.

The theme of migration enters the novel early in the form of mangrove trees. Subhash and Udayan learn about mangrove tree reproduction in science class: "They learned that if the propagules dropped at low tide they reproduced alongside the parents,

49

spearing themselves in brackish marsh. But at high water they drifted from their source of origin, for up to a year, before maturing in a suitable environment" (Lahiri 14-5). At first glance the parallel is clear: Udayan is the son who drops at low tide, remaining in his parents' house, whereas Subhash drifts from his source of origin, forsaking his parents. However, migration is not purely spatial in nature. When Subhash returns to India on a visit, he lunches at the Tolly Club that used to exclude him; he is now a member of the international cosmopolitan elite that constitutes the Tolly Club's postcolonial clientele. Even within the city where he is born, he has "migrated" in terms of affiliation. While Udayan remains at home with his parents, he leaves them more definitively by endangering himself than Subhash can through simple migration, and in fact he is found and killed at home, within view of his parents. Over the course of the novel the metaphor of mangrove trees becomes increasingly insufficient.

As Nina Martyris observes in "The Naxal Novel" (2014), *The Lowland* asks that we judge the brothers on "their political and personal commitments" (39) which move through multiple registers of individual and communal identity. Udayan's nationalist sentiments make it impossible for him to contemplate migrating in search of economic opportunity; however, his political opinions are formed by global influences, such as Mao's red book and his short wave radio. Although Udayan remains at home with his parents, his primary commitment is to the Naxalite movement, a movement that is itself both global and local, rooted in an internationalist Marxist ideology yet attempting to restructure India at a national level and intervene in land rights at a local level.

Subhash, on the other hand, takes little interest in sweeping global theories. He chooses to live abroad in the United States, but he does so to evade the communal

obligations placed upon him by his family: thinking upon "the distance that now separate[s] him from his family," he concludes, "it was here, in this minute but majestic corner of the world, that he could breathe" (Lahiri 79). When Subhash expresses his intention to leave India for the United States, Udayan accuses him of selfishness: "How can you walk away from what's happening? There, of all places?" (36) Subhash and Udayan are both "rooted cosmopolitans," but they choose oppositional ways of positioning themselves in relation to the global and the local: Subhash physically crosses borders to find individual self-fulfillment, while Udayan's engagement with global political struggles motivates him to remain at home. Both Subhash and Udayan are motivated by the desire to fully realize global community, but they do so by positioning themselves in relation to different communities (the American academic community vs. a community of Indian Marxist revolutionaries); as a result, the communities they construct entail two entirely different sets of rights and obligations.

Udayan: International Political Community

Udayan has a very clear sense of his obligations as part of a global community. His mother, Bijoli, recollects how "he collected worn-out items, old bedding and pots and pans, to distribute to families living in colonies, in slums. He would accompany a maid to her home, into the poorest sections of the city, to bring medicine. To summon a doctor if a member of her family was ill, to see to a funeral if someone died" (220). While Udayan's idealistic commitment to the poorest of his countrymen is admirable, the text problematizes this idealism through Subhash's perspective. Subhash views Udayan's revolutionary activities as ultimately futile: "Udayan had given his life to a movement

51

that had been misguided, that had caused only damage, that had already been dismantled. The only thing he'd altered was what their family had been" (137). The text provides ample evidence in support of Subhash's perspective: Udayan and Subhash's parents never recover from the loss of their son, and Guari and Subhash's failed marriage can be seen as a direct consequence of Udayan's death. Udayan's revolutionary impulses can be seen as neglect of what is *most* local: the house where he grew up and the family that raised him.

In her essay "The Revolutionary Man in Naxalite Literature" (2017), Aruna Krishnamurthy observes that the Naxalite movement "demanded a surrender of the particular to the universal, the suppression or postponement of private experience toward collective cause" (141) from its adherents. This is illustrated by an anecdote from Sumanta Banerjee's "Reflections of a One-Time Maoist Activist" (2009):

> An old woman from among the listeners asked [the party leader]: 'Do you have a family, wife and children?' He replied: 'Yes, but I've left my home to devote full time to the cause of liberating the peasantry of my country from their present plight.' The woman retorted: 'Son, if you can't look after your own little home and family, and remain indifferent to their plight, how can you shoulder the responsibility of taking care of all the peasant homes and leading them to a revolution in this vast country of ours?" (Banerjee 263-4).

The old woman's criticism might well be directed at Udayan, who exchanges one set of communal values for another. He delays his role as the member of a compound home, as dutiful father and husband and son: "After the revolution was successful, he'd told

[Guari], they'd bring children into the world. Only then." (Lahiri 131). Out of service to another communal obligation, his attempts to bring about greater equality for his fellow Indians, he harms his parents, wife, brother, and unborn child, sacrificing his personal connections to his communal ideals and neglecting the local for the global.

Within the text, Udayan espouses of a model of international political community that sacrifices intimate personal commitments in deference to a global movement opposing exploitative capitalism. However, the text resists an essentialist reading of Udayan that would make him an abstract avatar for Naxalite ideology. While at first telling his execution in the lowland seems a straightforward act of political martyrdom, we learn at the novel's very end that he was not thinking of his political ideals in his last moments, but of Guari. The fact that Udayan is about to die for his abstract ideals makes his devotion to Guari all the more poignant. Udayan reflects upon an intimate personal relationship with a woman who is, now, a member of his family; briefly, he elevates the personal above the political. Udayan's death demonstrates the insufficiency or impossibility of a form of community that is purely and exclusively political: his political death has personal and intimate ramifications.

Subhash: Cosmopolitanism under Neoliberalism

Subhash does not share Udayan's commitment to the nation, nor is he particularly concerned with the state of the poor. Subhash offers a competing set of values to the ones exemplified by Udayan, although in some ways they are just as radical: his commitment to Guari and her unborn child motivates him to defy convention and marry his brother's pregnant wife. During his life, Udayan criticizes Subhash for his selfishness, but after

Udayan's death, Guari gains a different understanding of Subhash's values, coming to regard him as "a better person than Udayan" (Lahiri 164). Again, this perspective is complicated by the text: Subhash's desire for Guari means that his motives for marrying her are not entirely unselfish. Nevertheless, Subhash becomes more of a parent to Guari and Udayan's child than Guari can be, and continues to care for the child after Guari leaves.

Subhash and Udayan both leave their parents: Subhash by emigrating to America, Udayan by bringing about his own death. This is not only a betrayal of the family but a betrayal of traditional cultural values, represented by Udayan and Subhash's parents' house, which they expand in anticipation of daughters-in-law and grandchildren. While "betrayal" is an extremely value-laden term, I use it not to condemn Subhash and Udayan as individuals but to characterize an action whereby one turns away from one's obligations to a person or culture. This betrayal is not an individual sin but a culturewide phenomenon. As Crystal Parikh observes, betrayals "manifest performances of certain kinds of difference, thereby making visible heterogeneous objects of loyalty, motives for violating such loyalties, and modes of violation" (Parikh 11). After Udayan's death, after Subhash leaves with Guari and her unborn child, their parents are left alone in what is meant to be a compound house, a constant reminder of their thwarted hopes. While Subhash continues to feel obligated to his parents, neither he nor Udayan will fulfill his parents' expectations. Yet Subhash's decision to turn away from his obligation to his parents is not a simple denial of his parents but "a moment of violent invention" (Parikh 12) through which he expresses new loyalties to his life in America, to his brother's widow, and to her unborn child.

Guari's First Migration: Migration and Family

There is textual evidence to suggest that such a betrayal was inevitable: both Udayan and Subhash are diverted from their expected path in life not only as individuals but as representatives of larger movements. While *The Lowland* chronicles a single family, it hints at a larger cultural shift, with migration becoming more and more commonplace. On Subhash's return trip to India to visit his parents, he lunches at the club that used to exclude him, where he was once paddled for trespassing. While it used to be exclusively for the use of the English, it now contains "a mix of Indians, most of them visiting, like Bela, from other countries, and some Europeans" (Lahiri 251). There is a growing population of cosmopolitan Indians who, like Bela, are "not made to survive here" (235). Subhash and Udayan have both betrayed their parents in the service of larger movements: Udayan for the Naxalite cause, and Subhash to become part of a new transnational cosmopolitan class.

The Lowland opens with all of its characters centrally located in the locality of Tollygunge; however, as the text progresses, they spread out across multiple continents, and in the process reveal the contours of a global cultural shift and a growing diaspora. Subhash's migration is placed within a chronological context: he arrives in America shortly after "Immigration laws… changed, making it easier for Indian students to enter [the United States]" (Lahiri 36). Subhash migrates to America shortly after the formation of the Communist Party of India, which occured in 1969, so we can assume that the text is referring to the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which abolished a quota system

that gave preference to immigrants from historically white nations.[23] The 1965 Act radically altered the composition of American immigrants in ways that no one expected, and in *The Lowland* we see this transformation occur over the course of several decades: while Subhash is one of only "a few other Indians" (Lahiri 44) at the University of Rhode Island, by the time Guari is teaching in California Indian students attend American universities in great numbers. Guari notes that they "tended to be wealthy, pleased to be in America, not intimidated by it. They'd been made in a different India. At ease, it seemed, anywhere in the world" (283).

These wealthy students are part of the wave which Min Song calls "the children of 1965" (Song 353), the Asian American children of professionals who migrated to the U.S. in the wake of the 1965 Immigration Act. As Bill Hing writes in *Defining America through Immigration Policy* (2004), the 1965 act "us[ed] family relationships as the signifying factor for immigrant settlement" (110), making it relatively easy for Asian professionals to migrate with their spouse or child. Guari's marriage to Subhash is engineered to take advantage of this relatively recent change to the law, as the scene of their wedding makes clear: "After the registration Subhash took her to apply for her passport, and then to the American consulate for her visa. The person in charge of the application congratulated them, assuming that they were happy" (Lahiri 153). This brisk, practical description stands in contrast to the one that immediately precedes it, which contrasts this second wedding to Guari's first: "No cotton quilt like the one under which she and Udayan had first lain as husband and wife, in the house in Chetla, the coolness of that evening driving them into each other's arms, the modesty that had checked her desire

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[23] For a legal-historical analysis of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, see Hing (2004).

56

quickly giving way." (153) While Guari's first wedding was a marriage of passion, and her memory of it is framed by sensual, poetic language, her marriage to Subhash is strictly procedural: family is a means by which Guari will migrate, escaping an untenable situation.

Shortly after her arrival in the United States, Guari and Subhash attend a gathering at the house of Subhash's acquaintance, a professor of economics named Narasimhan. This gathering is Guari's first exposure to an Indian American subculture. Narasimhan appears very Americanized: he dresses in a western style, with "heavy sideburns" and "bell-bottomed jeans" (Lahiri 44), and he has a red-haired American wife "as opposed to whatever girl from Madras his family had wanted for him" and "two tanned, light-eyed sons who looked like neither of their parents" (ibid.). In addition to inviting Subhash and Guari to his home, he invites "a number of Indian couples" (166) who talk about "organizing a Diwali festival on campus" (167). Had they remained in India, these couples almost certainly would never have met: Narasimhan is from Madras in the south, Subhash and Guari are from Tollygunge in the west, and other couples at the gathering may be from other, unspecified parts of India.

Scenes from *The Lowland* set in India encourage us to view Tollygunge as a specific locality, rather than some abstract stand-in for India as a whole. Parts of India are represented in their specificity, and can only be returned to in their specificity. In fact, the novel's very beginning is a description of the eponymous lowland and the surrounding area, and begins with directions that presume familiarity with the area: "East of the Tolly Club, after Deshapran Sashmal Road splits in two, there is a small mosque" (3). These directions presume an intimacy, a knowledge of Tollygunge in its particularity.

These descriptions, the heart of Subhash's childhood in India, would not resonate with anyone else at the gathering; none are from Tollygunge, and none are people Subhash would have known before his migration. At this gathering we see a new community of Indian professionals brought to America through the 1965 Act. A particular and defininite subculture is demonstrated, one which Guari explicitly resists by cutting her hair and destroying her Indian clothes some days after.

In keeping with the 1965 Act's emphasis on families, Subhash notes that this gathering is comprised entirely of couples and families with children; Subhash himself is only invited to participate in this subculture after he tells Narasimhan that he now has a family. Subhash notes that he and Guari are treated as part of this collection of families: "[they] were greeted and regarded as one… No one questioned that Guari was his wife, or that he was soon to be the father of her child" (167). While Subhash is pleased that he and Guari are viewed as a nuclear family, Guari reacts by violently shredding all of her petticoats, blouses, and saris "as if an animal had shredded the fabric with its teeth and claws" (168), and chooses to dress instead in a Western style, with short hair and clothes that conform to her body. When asked if she would like to invite over the women she met at the gathering, she tells Subhash "I have nothing in common with them" (ibid.), refusing to identify as a member of this subculture of Indian American families and foreshadowing her decision to abandon her child.

Despite Guari's protestations, she does have something in common with these women other than nation of origin. Guari's migration is contingent upon her role in a young Indian American family headed by a professional with a valuable skill set. The other couples are "mostly graduate students in engineering, in mathematics, and their

wives" (167); like Guari, these women are in America because of their relationship to men of a professional background and the reforms of 1965. Descriptions of Narasimhan's home suggest a comfortable upper-middle-class affluence, with a "large wood-paneled living room" and "a deck that wrapped around two sides of the house" (ibid.). The attendants of this gathering are not tied together by the similarity of their lives in India, but by the circumstances that brought them to America and the socioeconomic niche they fill there. The children of these young professionals will not be raised in the relative poverty that is commonly associated with recent immigrants.

In "The Children of 1965" (2007) Min Song repeats some commonly accepted truths about these children, who are regarded as:

> uniformly privileged and well educated; little makes them different from their professional white peers; race is only a residual concern for them (not having felt the sharp pain of de jure discrimination nor in some cases defacto prejudice); being perceived as Americans is more important than whatever attenuated ties they might have to the Asian countries from which their forebears may have departed… (Song 353)

While Song calls these claims the "uncritical retelling of the ethnic bildungsroman" (ibid.), he nevertheless insists that we examine the kind of cultural script that they create. *The Lowland*'s chronological sprawl, which encompasses four generations of Subhash's family, allows the reader to experience the reverberations of the 1965 Act in a single novel, and the story of Subhash's child Bela raises the question: how much does the unwitting daughter of a deceased Naxalite revolutionary differ from her professional white peers?

Guari's Second Migration: Migration as a Means of Feminist Liberation

Guari stands alone in *The Lowland* as the sole example of a woman abandoning her family. On the plane ride to California, Guari feels the weight of her severed obligations: "She entered a new dimension, a place where a fresh life was given to her. The three hours on her watch that separated her from Bela and Subhash were like a physical barrier, as massive as the mountains she'd flown over to get here. She'd done it, the worst thing that she could think of doing" (Lahiri 281). Guari is preoccupied not by the physical difference of some 3000 miles, but by the three hours it took her to travel those miles, a period of time which itself becomes "a physical barrier." In addition, the act of migration instigates a spiritual metamorphosis as she enters "a new dimension," "a fresh life" (ibid.). The distance between New Jersey and California is measured chronologically and experientially rather than spatially.

More than a change in location, Guari's travel through space represents a change in affiliation. As Paudyal notes, "[Guari's] identity is based on her personal choices and affiliations, rather than on her national citizenship or antecedent properties" (Paudyal 28). Guari chooses to remain a citizen of India, for instance, because she feels to switch her citizenship would be a betrayal of Udayan. As a result, Guari's citizenship and her community are almost entirely disconnected from each other. The community Guari interacts with every day is comprised of her students and professional connections, and is completely separate from the identity she left behind in India.

Guari serves as a reminder that it is possible to use migration as a tool to escape the obligations of family, but her freedom to sever ties is problematized by the long-term

effects the reader witnesses in the family she leaves behind, raising a tension between filiative and affiliative obligations. Guari's freedom to affiliate freely negatively impacts her filiative connection, her biological child, creating an ethical dilemma that the text does not effectively resolve. We are left to wonder whether Guari's newfound affiliative autonomy outweighs her filiative transgression.

The advent of the internet age makes it easier than ever for Guari to choose her affiliations regardless of space: she searches for members of the family she left behind on the internet; reconnects with her brother Manash, who is still in India, via email; and researches the Naxalite movement and Kanu Sanyal. Although Guari's life in California seems entirely divorced from her previous lives, the internet is a living document where "the past is there, appended to the present" (Lahiri 335). Guari's internet searches demonstrate her continuing engagement with her past, but unlike the obligations inspired by close proximity to family members, through the internet Guari is able to choose when and how she engages with Subhash, Manash, and India's past.

Guari's area of specialization, the neo-Marxists of the Frankfurt School, could be viewed as a tribute to Udayan, but she acknowledges that Udayan would have found her abstract philosophical engagement unsatisfactory: "Her ideology was isolated from practice, neutered by its long tenure in the academy. Long ago she'd wanted her work to be in deference to Udayan, but by now it was a betrayal of everything he had believed in. All the ways he had influenced and inspired her, shrewdly cultivated for her own intellectual gain" (284). Her admiration for Udayan's radical political philosophy is subverted, used to further Guari's career in a university system that is undeniably capitalist. Not only is this a demonstration of Guari's pursuit of individual fulfillment

above all else, but it simultaneously serves as a criticism of radical academia's collusion with neoliberalism. Although she studies neo-Marxists, Guari identifies with her position in a capitalist structure. Her personal interactions exist exclusively within the sphere of professional development, her existence as a social being entirely subjugated by the demands of her career.

California provides a fitting escape for Guari, as its earliest white residents were also double-migrants of a sort, having travelled not only across the Atlantic Ocean but across the continental United States as well. Although compressed in time, Guari's journey is strikingly similar to this early American double-migration: first she travels to Rhode Island, one of the original 13 colonies, then migrates once more to younger, forward-thinking southern California. There she finds community among other transplants and migrants from the East Coast who "slipped from their former skins" and "tethered themselves to California, never coming back" (285). She makes no effort to look for other Indian migrants, those with similar roots; rather, she bonds with people on the basis of a shared future, participating in "that collective sense of discovery, of gratitude for the place" (ibid.).

In California Guari's only regular companion is her own solitude, which is personified as the most fulfilling relationship of her life: "Isolation… greeted her at the end of each day and lay still with her at night… it was something upon which she'd come to depend, with which she'd entered by now into a relationship, more satisfying and enduring than the relationships she'd experienced in either of her marriages" (287). Guari's pursuit of fulfilling solitude, her determination not to permit any of her lovers to "complicate her life" (ibid.), is only ever challenged in the form of Lorna, a graduate

student with whom Guari begins an affair while serving as outside reader on her dissertation. Lorna receives a job in Toronto and leaves Guari to pursue a professional opportunity, in a move reminiscent of Guari's own liberatory migration to California—although, as Guari recognizes, the connection Lorna abandoned was rootless, with no sense of commitment: "There had never been any discussion of their encounters evolving into anything else" (291). Guari recognizes how this broken affiliation echoes those that have defined her life to date:

> Guari saw how the relationship had shifted: how she had reverted from lover to colleague, nothing more.
>
> It was not unlike the way her role had changed at so many other points in the past. From wife to widow, from sister-in-law to wife, from mother to childless woman. With the exception of losing Udayan, she had actively chosen to take these steps.
>
> She had married Subhash, she had abandoned Bela. She had generated alternative versions of herself, she had insisted at brutal cost on these conversions. Layering her life only to strip it bare, only to be alone in the end. (ibid.)

The rootless affiliation that Guari prizes, the ability to escape one's obligations by migrating to another life, can also be used against her—her affiliations can be broken without her consent as the people she values decide to reinvent themselves.

This realization does not motivate Guari to search for more rooted or stable connections. Instead she romanticizes the possibilities of communal connection through the virtual world, where affiliations are formed voluntarily with no regard for physical

location: "A revolutionary concept, already taken for granted. Citizens of the Internet dwell free from hierarchy. There is room for everyone, given that there are no spatial constraints. Udayan might have appreciated this" (336). Guari imagines the internet as Appiah's cosmopolitan ideal "in which people are free to choose the local forms of human life within which they will live" (Appiah 622), an alternate, non-hierarchical structure of engagement and community that is truly global in scale.

However, had Udayan lived to witness the internet age, he might have pointed out that internet access is far from universal, as is the literacy required to participate in this virtual world of voluntary affiliation. Paudyal notes this criticism of a non-hierarchical internet age while simultaneously minimizing it: "In actuality, in today's world, there might still be some constraints, especially for poor people, to travel physically from one place to another—but there are no constraints for them to cross boundaries in the virtual world as long as they are literate and have access to the internet" (Pauydal 29). While the internet seems to herald a borderless cosmopolitan utopia, in actuality it throws into sharp relief the global class divide. It would be difficult to argue that literacy and internet access are *not* classed gateways to the internet. Guari's inability to recognize this speaks to her desire for a world where affiliation is costless and free from hierarchies of power.

All of Guari's familial relationships have been burdened with gendered expectations, requiring constant self-sacrifice: her in-laws demand housework, Subhash and Bela demand childcare, Udayan demands that she obey his parents and also demands intelligence that leads to a police officer's death. In California, Guari creates a life for herself where she is free to pursue her own individual interests; because she has no stable, long-term relationships, very little is required of her. This lifestyle is only possible

through migration, which allows Guari to leave behind multiple families and multiple sets of obligations. Guari's release from the structure of family is also a release from repressive gendered expectations, so her migration is both an act of betrayal and of feminist liberation. This is a third possible life, a third possible relationship to the world that the novel proposes: a life where individual choice unquestionably trumps communal obligation; where, as on the internet, proximity is a matter of personal preference; where affiliations are seamlessly, costlessly created and broken. Guari's decision to embrace affiliative connections over filiative, and the freedoms she gains as a result, serves as a reminder that filiative obligations are gendered, and liberation from those obligations may come with a cost.

Although Guari fashions her life so as to avoid commitments and entanglements, she does not disappear from Subhash and Bela's narrative; her continued inclusion in the novel demonstrates that despite her migration and metamorphosis into a single woman, her actions (or her refusal to act) continue to have a profound impact upon her family. Although on opposite sides of the continental US, although rarely intersecting, they continue to live alongside each other. This is a feature of the novel, as noted by Anderson: characters may be miles apart, may in fact never meet, but continue to exist within the same imagined space. In the case of *The Lowland*, this shared space is not a nation but a compound trauma, a community that coheres around its own fragmentation. The unrealized but potential reconciliation at the novel's end hints towards the possibility that some form of community may be rebuilt or reclaimed. The mangrove tree model of diaspora offered at the novel's beginning, the seed that leaves and the seed that remains,

is not an adequate model for the ambiguous space where Guari finds herself, with the potential for an imperfect return, for some fragmented sense of community to be restored.

Bela: The Banyan Tree Model of Community

We have already dismissed mangrove trees as an insufficient botanical metaphor, and in later pages we find a more suitable replacement in the banyan tree that grows, fittingly, at the Tolly Club. Growing alongside "a mix of Indians… from other countries… and some Europeans" (Lahiri 251), the banyan is described as "a tree that began life attached to another, sprouting from its crown. The mass of twisted strands, hanging down like ropes, were aerial roots surrounding the host. Over time they coalesced, forming additional trunks, encircling a hollow core if the host happened to die" (ibid.). This banyan tree offers a model of heritage that is so multiply rooted that the point of origin, Tollygunge, can be abandoned; other roots will coalesce to take its place. While the tree begins life attached to another, the possibility for other attachments keeps this first attachment from being definitive.

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What might this structure of multiple, aerial roots look like in practice? We can look to Bela's growth for answers. She is torn from her original points of origin: her biological father, her hometown, and finally, her mother. This triad forms the "hollow core" around which Bela grows. The loss of Guari is the last and greatest trauma: "It was as if a bone had broken in her body, the counselor explained. It was not simply a matter of time before it mended, nor was it possible for [Subhash] to set it right" (263). While the metaphor of a broken bone externalizes Bela's trauma, it fails to communicate how something has been irrevocably lost. The dead core of the banyan tree, on the other hand, can never be replaced; even if Guari were to return, it would not change the fact that she left.

After graduating from college, Bela becomes a migrant farm worker, living "without insurance, without heed for her future. Without a fixed address" (270). While

she returns periodically to the house where she was raised and the man who raised her, Subhash theorizes that Guari's absence has left her unable to be vulnerable: "He knew, even when [Bela] returned, that part of her was closed off from him. That her sense of limits was fierce. And though she seemed to have found herself, he feared that she was still lost" (272). Subhash even notes the resemblance between Bela's transitory lifestyle and Guari's refusal to be tied down by familial obligations: "At the end of each visit she zipped her bag and left him, never saying when she'd be back. She disappeared, as Guari disappeared, her vocation taking precedence. Defining her, directing her course" (ibid.). Like Guari, Bela's vocational self takes precedence over her filiative connections.

However, Bela's work, what Subhash calls "a rootless path" (273), is very rooted in a global sense of community, and in fact Subhash's description of her efforts to improve the world is very reminiscent of Bijoli's recollection of Udayan's acts of international political community. Bela, too, dedicates her life to helping those most in need, and her work develops a political bent, as well:

Over the years her work started merging with a certain ideology. He saw that there was a spirit of opposition to the things she did.

She was spending time in cities, in blighted sections of Baltimore and Detroit. She helped to convert abandoned properties into community gardens. She taught low-income families to grow vegetables in their backyards, so that they wouldn't have to depend entirely on food banks. (272)

Bela echoes Udayan's concern for the hungry, and his combination of theory with praxis. Udayan advocated for a revolution that never came, but on a more concrete level, Bijoli

recounts, he delivered worn-out items and medicine to villagers in need. Bela's work also stems from deep-seated political convictions: "She was opposed to eating food that had to be transported long distances. To the patenting of seeds. She talked to [Subhash] about why farmers still went hungry. She blamed the unequal distribution of wealth" (273). Bela's concern for the environment and the distribution of resources ties her not only to a global community, but also echoes the father she never met. Although Bela is unaware, the reader sees the invisible roots that tie Bela to Udayan's political action in India, a connection that is at once both global in scale and incredibly intimate and specific.

While Subhash and Udayan's parents expected that they would all continue to live in Tollygunge as a family unit, Subhash has no such expectations for Bela; yet, unexpectedly, the novel's end sees the creation of a new compound house containing three generations of Subhash's family. Bela's transient agrarian lifestyle and her pregnancy out of wedlock would seem to indicate a rootless existence, yet her return to Rhode Island to raise her child in the house where she grew up gestures towards a kinship structure, what Appiah might call a "rootedness." However, the roots to which Bela returns are not those in Tollygunge, where the novel began; rather, Bela returns to the roots that Subhash puts down in Rhode Island, after his migration. In choosing her roots, Bela demonstrates her freedom: she chooses affiliation with a man who is not her biological father and a place that is not her ancestral homeland but to which she is nonetheless deeply tied. Bela's return to Rhode Island demonstrates the flexibility of cosmopolitan rootedness; she has access to multiple histories, traditions, and even multiple father figures, but ultimately adapts Subhash as her model for raising her own child. Bela's freedom is not equivalent to rootlessness, and her mostly-happy ending in a

cosmopolitan compound household demonstrates that globalization and migration do not necessarily precede isolation and the destruction of the family.

The wide array of narrative possibilities open to Bela bring with them the possibility of disconnect, and her reunion with Guari is not so much a reconnecting as a redistancing, with Bela wanting "[t]o be rid of [Guari], to kill her all over again" (385). This, too, is an aspect of cosmopolitanism: Bela's freedom to affiliate, or to choose not to affiliate, extends to her mother. This is a very different relationship from the one that Subhash recalls having with his parents before he left India: "He had belonged to his parents and to Udayan, and they to him. That was all" (306). This tension between filiative and affiliative relationships is a defining characteristic of the contemporary cosmopolitan novel, which depicts the transformation of the family within an increasingly global capitalist structure.

The structures which bound together Subhash, Udayan, and their parents survive only in echoes, and Subhash and Bela have to create new ways to connect with each other in an increasingly mobile and cosmopolitan world. *The Lowland* asks: what rights and obligations can family members have for each other in a world where it is possible to abandon your family and start over somewhere else? How can we reimagine rights and obligations for a globalized present in which more and more relationships are affiliative, rather than filiative? *The Lowland* depicts a family in process, reckoning with both the disconnects and the new forms of connection possible in a globalized present.

Structural Recall: The Banyan Structure

70

While *The Lowland* is for the most part linear in progression, it structurally echoes the subjective experience of memory by "recalling" other sections of the novel. After the death of his friend Richard, for instance, Subhash recollects his childhood spent with Udayan, descriptions that echo moments from earlier in the novel while adding something new. A description of Subhash and Udayan studying in the present tense, "They stayed up late, working on equations and formulas. It was quiet enough at night to hear the jackals howling in the Tolly Club" (16), becomes, hundreds of pages and decades of fictional time later, "Books spread between them, memorizing so many things. Writing in a notebook, concentrating, his face just inches above the page. Lying beside him at night, listening to the jackals howling in the Tolly Club" (305). Udayan's recollection does not refer back to a distinct moment in time; rather, it evokes a set of sensory perceptions that appeared earlier in the text.

This process of structural recall within the novel creates a multiplicity of "roots," impressions that can be returned to later through a similar set of events. There is no single repeating motif; rather, every character lives simultaneously in past and present tense, both in the linear plot and in their memory of events that have already occurred. This structure allows for a certain amount of freedom in how events are recalled, as Bela draws upon a wide family "lexicon" of impressions and experiences. Her return to Rhode Island echoes both the multigenerational compound family that her grandparents never possessed and her own single-parent childhood in Rhode Island. Bela is an incarnation of Appiah's cosmopolitan patriot, rooted on multiple continents while also able to move about and affiliate herself freely.

Traumatic Returns

In *Reading Trauma Narratives: The Contemporary Novel and the Psychology of Oppression* (2015), Laurie Vickroy observes that "trauma literature— that is, literature written with a conscious awareness of the concept" is a relatively recent phenomenon, "a kind of contemporary genre" in which "narratives incorporate the gaps, uncertainties, dissociations, and visceral details of living through traumatic experiences" (3). Authors fashioning literary representations of trauma have access to an extensive body of knowledge including medical and psychological studies of trauma, testimony of those who have experienced trauma, and the humanities-based trauma theory, which Jeffrey C. Alexander describes in "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma" (2004) as "a kind of academic counterpart to the psychoanalytic intervention" (6). As Alexander notes, "the major theoretical and empirical statements of the psychoanalytic version of lay trauma theory have been produced by scholars in the various disciplines of the humanities," drawing on theorists beloved by literature departments: "Because within the psychoanalytic tradition it has been Lacan who has emphasized the importance of language in emotional formation, it has been Lacanian theory, often in combination with Derridean deconstruction, that has informed these humanities based studies of trauma" (ibid.).

Instances of return and recurrence within *The Lowland* mirror the structure of trauma as described by psychoanalysis and trauma theory, inviting the use of trauma theory as an interpretive lens. At many points within the novel, an event that remains unincorporated into the main narrative for decades is revealed to have been controlling the narrative in the same way that traumatic unincorporated memories, as Cathy Caruth

observes in her "Introduction" to *American Imago* (1991), "repeatedly possess, in intrusive images and thoughts, the one who has lived through them" (Caruth 417). At the center of this narrative are events which occur, but then cannot be made manifest in the narrative—in the language—until much later.

For instance, from Subhash's perspective we see evidence of the deep wound that Guari's absence has inflicted upon Bela, yet Bela is denied agency over her own experience in a narrative that is largely about her; the reader learns of her comings and goings from Subhash. When Bela "speaks" to us for the first time in Part VI, she is preoccupied by which of her thoughts can be translated into language and in that sense narratively owned:

> Were her mother ever to stand before her, even if Bela could choose any language on earth in which to speak, she would have nothing to say.
>
> But no, that's not true. She remains in constant communication with her. Everything in Bela's life has been a reaction. I am who I am, she would say, I live as I do because of you. (Lahiri 316)

At this moment within the text, we witness the moment that Bela's traumatic experiences are incorporated into her narrative. Within the span of two paragraphs, we see Bela move from not having the language to express her experience into recognizing and owning her experience—an ownership which, as Caruth argues, requires language and narrative:

> Not having been fully integrated as it occurred, the [traumatic] event cannot become… a "narrative memory" that is integrated into a completed story of the past… the trauma thus seems to evoke the difficult truth of a

history that is constituted by the very incomprehensibility of its occurrence. (Caruth 419)

Bela's realization, the passage in which she gains language and agency over the remainder of the narrative, is the moment in the text where Guari's absence enters into comprehensibility. While Bela was always experiencing Guari's absence, only now does it become intelligible, a memory that she can own and control using language. This speech act that occurs within Bela's inner monologue, relayed to the reader through indirect discourse, mirrors what Van der Kolk and Ducey say is necessary for recovery from trauma, which will be "relived repeatedly, until a person learns to remember simultaneously the affect and cognition associated with the trauma through access to language" (Van der Kolk and Ducey 271). In the moment that Bela internally voices the wound left by her mother, she begins the process of recovery.

The narrative agrees with this model of recovery: shortly after her realization, Bela returns to Rhode Island, takes her place as part of a happy multi-generational compound family, and enters into a stable relationship with a man named Drew. When she is able to name what Guari did and the effect it had on her, she can begin to heal. In Rhode Island, while living in the childhood home where Bela's trauma occurred, we witness as Bela expresses her trauma to another person: "[S]he told Drew the truth about her mother. That she'd left and never returned" (Lahiri 366). Although within the narrative decades have passed since the time of Guari's leaving, it is only now that we learn that Bela "used to sit inside the closet where her mother had kept her things… She would stuff a pillow into her mouth, in case her father came home early, and heard her crying. She remembered crying so hard that the skin beneath her eyes would swell,

marking her for a time with two inflated smiles that were paler than the rest of her" (366-7). The banyan structure, the past's ability to resurface inside the present, allows Bela to attain a sort of narrative resolution to her trauma when Drew witnesses her suffering and responds: "I'm not going anywhere, he said" (367). As Vickroy notes in *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* (2002), "testimony… has been a successfully used therapeutic method, provided there is an empathic listener" (Vickroy 6); in serving as that listener, Drew helps Bela on her path to recovery.

Before Guari's return to Rhode Island, the narrative makes a return to India, to a time before the death of Udayan. Only now does the reader learn that Guari is partially responsible for the death of a policeman killed by Udayan's organization. Before leaving India, pregnant with Bela, Guari seeks out the dead man's house; rather than a return to a home, this is a return to the scene of Guari's crime. As a widow carrying an unborn child, Guari feels a tragic solidarity with the wife and child of the man: "the mother… wore white… as Guari had worn until a few weeks ago" (Lahiri 361). Looking at the child, "She saw the loss that would never be replaced, a loss that the child forming inside her shared" (360). While Guari's migration to America creates physical distance between herself and the death of the policeman, his death is not incorporated into the narrative, or into Guari's thoughts as we know them, for decades; the absence of the policeman, both from his family and from the text, forms a traumatic break within Guari's narrative that migration cannot heal or fix.

This information provides new context for Guari's actions without absolving her of guilt, creating discomfort for the reader in search of simple resolutions. As Vickroy

argues in *Reading Trauma Narratives: The Contemporary Novel and the Psychology of Oppression* (2015):

> [Trauma narratives] stimulate readers' own perceptual and ethical frameworks by attempting to give readers access to experiences that are difficult to understand and sympathize with because they challenge normative Western conceptions of individual free will and trait-driven behavior. That is, traumatic experience challenges concepts of a consistent or reliable personality… [and] raises the possibility that extreme circumstances undermine the capacity of the traumatized to behave ethically, for example being able to take responsibility for others and themselves, or to treat others fairly and compassionately. (*Reading Trauma Narratives* 26)

Subhash and Bela's continued presence in the narrative, the persistence of their pain, denies us the emotional catharsis that would come from absolving Guari, yet we are progressively invited to witness more of what she suffered and interpret how it affected her ability to behave lovingly and selflessly towards Subhash and Bela. Guari's subsequent journey to the sites of her guilt, Rhode Island and Tollygunge, may be read as an attempt to grapple with her multiple traumas by confronting them in physical space. In accordance with the banyan structure appearing elsewhere in the novel, however, this return is never total; instead, it brings new growth.

Unlike Bela's return, Guari's does not offer a narratively satisfying ending. Guari is not allowed to offer an explanation for her behavior or to connect with Bela; she feels her prolonged absence as "an abyss that could not be crossed" (Lahiri 380). This scene is

the culmination of a narrative that has asked us to identify with Guari and the family she wounded in turns; here we are invited to identify with both Guari and Bela simultaneously. Bela is "shivering. She could not control it" while Guari feels "the same suspension of certainty, the same unannounced but imminent threat, as when the walls in California would trembled during a minor quake… never knowing… whether or not she would be spared" (379-380). Vickroy observes that "Readers can be made uncomfortable when confronted with the difficulties of considering relations between perpetrators and victims, who can be the same person" (*Reading Trauma Narratives* 30); in this scene, we are asked to empathize with the agony of perpetrator and victim simultaneously.

    After leaving Bela without reconciliation, Guari continues retracing her steps, returning to India and to the scenes of trauma that she experienced there. Guari tells Manash that she "needed to see it again" (Lahiri 389), but the India she left has changed and grown as much as the girl she left. She returns to "the house in which she was once destined to grow old with Udayan" (391) and is forced to confront that it is not as she left it: "it looked younger, the edges smoother, the facade painted a warm orange shade" (ibid.). The eponymous lowland, the place of Udayan's death, also no longer exists, and Guari experiences dissonance when the clear picture in her mind refuses to align with reality: "She walked past the house, across the lane, and over toward the two ponds. She had forgotten no detail. The color and shape of the ponds clear in her mind. But the details were no longer there. The ponds were gone. New homes filled up an area that had once been watery, open" (391-2).

    Although Guari has perfect recall of the events of Udayan's death, this is different from having linguistic mastery of the memory, as Caruth explains:

77

> [T]he transformation of the trauma into a narrative memory that allows the
> story to be verbalized and communicated, to be integrated into one's own,
> and others', knowledge of the past, may lose both the precision and the
> force that characterizes traumatic recall. Thus in the story of Janet's patient
> Irene, her cure is characterized by the fact that she can tell a 'slightly
> different story' to different people: the capacity to remember is also the
> capacity to elide or distort, and in other cases, as van der Kolk and van der
> Hart show, may mean the capacity simply to forget. (420)

The total precision and clarity with which Guari recalls the location of Udayan's death is characteristic of a traumatic memory, but lacks the flexibility of a narrative memory. Udayan's death cannot be incorporated into the rest of Guari's experience, including the evidence of her decades-long absence from India: "She was unprepared for the landscape to be so altered. For there to be no trace of that evening, forty autumns ago" (Lahiri 392). Guari is unable to tell a "slightly different story," to adapt her understanding of events to a new time and a new environment.

Guari's confrontation with the incomprehensibility of trauma leads to a near suicide attempt as she contemplates throwing herself off of the balcony: "the purpose of her return was to take her leave" (395). However, rather than simply dying, Guari grows, naming and integrating her traumatic experience: "she released the things that fettered her. What she'd seen from the terrace in Tollygunge. What she'd done to Bela. The image of a policeman passing beneath a window, holding his son by the hand" (396). In one of the book's most stirring passages, Guari confronts the non-existence of Udayan, experiencing it once again: "She opened her eyes. He was not there" (ibid.).

Within the context of Guari's cathartic metamorphosis, the final telling of Udayan's death from his own perspective becomes all the more significant; while it may well be a telling of events from Udayan's perspective, it is also potentially a way for Guari to incorporate the memory of Udayan's political sacrifice and to understand it by relating it to his love for her. To return to Bakhtin's observation that in the novel form "the division of voices and languages takes place within the limits of a single syntactic whole" (305), *The Lowland* does not clearly demarcate the boundaries between individual perspectives, which the reader is expected to deduce from context. Individual voices combine in *The Lowland* to form a communal narrative, without quotation marks interceding to cleanly separate one character's thoughts or words from another's. Within this structure, and given its singular position within the narrative, Udayan's final thoughts as reported by the text may well be a communal expression of reconciliation and understanding, rather than the thoughts of an individual with no need for narrative memory and no ability to communicate his experience.

The Lowland chronicles a community's attempts to cohere around shared experience and memory, but frequently the members of this community are thwarted by trauma, by experiences that resist speech and narrative. The struggle to overcome this trauma forms the novel's key conflict, and it can only be resolved through the telling and retelling of shared experience from multiple perspectives. It is the text as an object, the collection of narrative experiences collected within *The Lowland*'s pages, that offers a model of global community, and suggests how postcolonial trauma might be healed through the novel form.

2.0 CHAPTER 2: TRANGENERATIONAL AND TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITY IN YAA GYASI'S *HOMEGOING*

How does a novel function as a novel without a protagonist? While novels generally follow the character arc of a small number of protagonists, in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* (2016) the title of "protagonist" is passed like a baton from chapter to chapter, never returning to the same character twice. The novel follows the descendants of Effia and Esi, two half-sisters who enter Cape Coast Castle under wildly different circumstances and never meet. Effia is married off to a slaver in Cape Coast Castle, and her descendants work in the slave trade; Esi is transported to America on a slave ship, and her descendants are slaves. The chapters are divided equally between the descendants of Effia and Esi, each chapter progressing a single generation so that we read of Effia, then Esi, then Effia's child, then Esi's child, and so on for 250 years, seven generations, and two continents, with no dominant protagonist that the reader can follow throughout the narrative.

Rather than the development of an individual subjectivity, *Homegoing* traces the development of a transnational and transgenerational consciousness. The progression of history is experienced at the individual level in each chapter, while the scope of the novel as a whole reveals that same history to be broader and deeper than the scope of individual comprehension. While the narrator and the reader come closer to a full understanding of

the narrative than each individual character, gaps in the narrative still exist, moments between chapters that the individual characters experience while the reader does not. This push/pull between the individual characters, with their direct experience of trauma and their allotment of a single lifetime to contribute to an understanding of historical events, and the reader's status as a witness-by-proxy with a more bird's-eye view, creates an unusual narrative experience for a genre that is known for its focus on individual subjectivity.

Due to its scope, it is difficult to categorize *Homegoing* the way we might other forms of transnational literature. Conversations about transnational African/American literature are dominated by the Afropolitan genre, which depends upon a protagonist who is affluent and mobile enough to travel across national borders.[24] Even when transnational works are brought up in contrast to Afropolitanism,[25] at some point a character gains the means to travel from the global South to the West. By contrast, most of the characters in *Homegoing* remain in the nation where they were born or are forcibly removed from it; it is only at the novel's end that the characters attain personal mobility. For most of the novel, it is the reader and the narrator that are mobile, able to leap back and forth between continents.

Rather than an individual subject, the novel's narrator is a somewhat depersonalized entity who possesses 250 years of communal memory. Readers may be

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[24] The term "Afropolitanism" was popularized by Taiye Selasi in her essay "Bye-Bye Babar" (2005) and catalyzed a flurry of research using the term as an interpretive lens. Recent discussions of Afropolitanism include Eze (2014), Hallemeier (2015), Musila (2016), and Dabiri (2016).

[25] For an example of this framing, see Bwesigye Bwa Mwesigire's "Beyond the Afropolitan Postnation: The Contemporaneity of Jennifer Makumbi's *Kintu*" (2018) and its examination of NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013) as non-Afropolitan.

reminded of the 1993 film *Sankofa* and its eponymous drummer, the self-appointed guardian of Cape Coast Castle who sends the African-American model Mona back in time to live the life of her ancestors. The figure of Sankofa serves as a useful entry point for exploring how the structure and narrative voice of *Homegoing* function.

At the film's beginning, Mona poses for a white photographer on the beach near Cape Coast Castle, the trans-Atlantic slave trade's "gate of no return" serving as a picturesque backdrop for her provocative photoshoot. The Divine Drummer Sankofa, brandishing a staff decorated with a carved *sankofa* bird, exhorts Mona to return to her past and remember her heritage: "Back to your past. Return to your source. Go back to your past. You, you'll see" (*Sankofa)*.

After her confrontation with Sankofa, Mona descends into the dungeon of the Castle where she travels through time, coming face to face with slaves in chains. When she tries to run away, she is captured by African slavers, stripped, and branded, her present-day identity as an American citizen yielding to the collective experience of the Middle Passage.

In the next scene, we see Mona in antebellum America, and her voice tells us that she is a house slave named Shola. Mona no longer has access to her memory and identity as an American model, nor does she remember her experience being branded in the Castle; this new iteration of Mona identifies completely with the house slave Shola. For the bulk of the film, we follow Shola as she transforms from a cooperative house slave into a figure of resistance. Shola returns to the present transformed, having participated in a slave rebellion during which she killed her white rapist. She rejects the white

photographer whose gaze she catered to at the film's beginning and joins a group of black tourists and Africans listening to Sankofa's drums.

As Joshua Hirsch notes in "Afterimages: Post-Holocaust, Posttraumatic, and Postcolonial Cinemas" (2011), "Mona 'remembers' slavery precisely by forgetting her individual identity and merging with the identity of Shola" (Hirsch 423). Mona's transformation is enabled by the collective action of the slave rebellion and her access to the transnational collective memory of the slave trade and its repercussions. In Akan, the term and symbol for *sankofa* mean *Se wo werefi na wosankofa a yenkyi,* or in English, "it is no taboo to return to fetch something which has been forgotten" (Grayson 213). In her analysis of *Sankofa*, Sandra M. Grayson restates this as "return to the past in order to go forward" (Grayson 213): Mona must return to her collective history in order to free herself from oppression in the present day. *Sankofa* decenters Mona as an individualized agent and as an American citizen, recontextualizing her as part of a collective narrative of transnational and transgenerational resilience.

The mystical powers of Sankofa and the narrative powers of *Homegoing*'s narrator are derived from the same source: they wield knowledge of a historical trauma that is communal, trans-generational, and trans-national. In the telling of this history, characters who have fallen through gaps in the historical record, such as Shola, are given a voice. Present-day characters like Mona, who begin the narrative disconnected from their history, become aware of their place in an historical community. In both *Sankofa* and *Homegoing*, historical knowledge is a source of reconciliation and healing.

Homegoing explores the intersection between historical knowledge and personal empowerment, with characters deploying a range of epistemological strategies in order to

make sense of a massive traumatic event. While the characters of *Homegoing* do not have access to a complete view of their history, they are not passive recipients of knowledge; they actively pursue and create knowledge of what has happened to them and why. They create this knowledge using a variety of methodological approaches, from traditional academic research to dreams and visions which are decidedly non-scientific. All of these methodologies fall under the category of "subjugated knowledges" as designated by Foucault, because all seek to uncover a history of struggle. *Homegoing* mines history for subjugated knowledge, then releases that knowledge through narrative imagination.

In *Society Must Be Defended* (2003), Foucault provides two interrelated definitions of subjugated knowledges. Firstly, the term refers to "historical contents that have been buried or masked in functional coherences or formal systematizations" (*Society Must Be Defended* 7). We could classify the entire discipline of postcolonial studies as belonging to this first form of subjugated knowledges. Historical knowledge of colonized peoples has always been available to academic researchers; however, the perspective of colonized peoples was marginalized in historical records for centuries. Postcolonial studies as a discipline attempts to reclaim these marginalized knowledges of life under colonization through academic research.

Foucault also names a second form of subjugated knowledges, "a whole series of knowledges that have been disqualified as nonconceptual knowledges, as insufficiently elaborated knowledges: naive knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scienticity" (ibid.). This second definition encompasses any indigenous or popular knowledge. This category includes indigenous knowledge of the medical uses of plants, newspaper horoscopes, and

religious or mystical systems of belief. Whether true or untrue, all of these knowledges are scientifically invalid (at least until Western medicine subjects the medicinal plants to the scientific method).

Homegoing resides in the tense space between these two forms of subjugated knowledges. Gyasi draws on the academic revelation of buried knowledges by historical scholars, some of whom she lists in her acknowledgements section in an abridged bibliography. The first chapter of *Homegoing* tells the story of Effia the Beauty, one of the wenches of Cape Coast Castle. In looking at the historical sources that Gyasi used, one can see that while there are many records documenting the existence of these women, we have no narratives written from their perspective. Effia's chapter in *Homegoing* rights an historical wrong, giving voice to the voiceless in an act of creative justice.

While popular conceptions and depictions of the slave trade frequently rely on a binary understanding of the relationship between Africa and Europe, with all Europeans filling the role of oppressor/slaver and all Africans that of victim/enslaved, *Homegoing* complicates this binary by revealing the complex and sometimes collaborative relationship between the British, the Fante, and the Asante. For instance, it was common practice for members of the African Service to enter into sexual and domestic partnerships with local women. In *The Door of No Return: The History of Cape Coast Castle and the Atlantic Slave Trade* (2007), William St Clair notes that these marriage-like arrangements, while worthless within the system of British law, "were not informal casual sexual encounters… but marriages conducted in accordance with local African conventions that included polygamy" (St Clair 148). To the officers stationed at Cape Coast Castle, these women were not wives, but wenches—a word that in the 18th century

could be used to refer to a mistress or a maidservant, or as a familiar way to address one's wife or sweetheart (*OED*, "wench"). Many officers had a wife in England to whom they were legally married as well as one or more "wenches" who troubled the distinction between wife and mistress, straddling the uneasy border between British and Fante law.

St Clair provides a wealth of archival evidence that these "wench contracts" were common practice in Cape Coast Castle. However, if we were to judge solely from the evidence St Clair finds in the British National Archives, we might be forgiven for assuming that these contracts were predominantly economic in nature. The Castle archives, now located in the British National Archives, provide incredibly detailed records, prompting St Clair to remark that "there can be few buildings anywhere in the world about which more is knowable" (St Clair 8). The records enumerate when and how the wives were paid: initially, through a lump sum that functioned as the "bride price"; monthly throughout the length of the contract; and finally, after the death of an officer, "a lump sum equivalent to about a year's maintenance payments" (150). Yet despite this exhaustively recorded financial information, nearly every other element of these contracts remains a mystery, including what the officers of the Castle received in return for their payment. St Clair provides us with but a few of many unanswered questions:

> What was exchanged in these local marriages? Did, for example, the partners usually share a language? Was it from their wenches that so many officers learned to speak the Fante language? And if they were posted to another locality, did they take their wench with them or start again and learn another language? Did wenches live in the officer's apartments in the Castle? Was that why women were allowed upstairs in the Castle? Or,

as is also recorded, did the wench live in the town nearby? Did they take

meals together? ... And how far did fathers participate in the bringing up

of the children? (151)

We do not know where these wenches lived, how they spent their time, or how they

related to the Castle's other residents, both black and white. Although we have written

logs that catalogue all of the political and economic goings-on in Cape Coast Castle, we

lack qualitative information about the domestic lives of the officers and, to an even

greater extent, the wenches. The subjective experience of these women has been

historically silenced; they have been reduced to figures on a balance sheet.

How does this silencing function? The answer can be found in history's

definition: "A *written narrative* constituting a continuous chronological record of

important or public events..." (*OED*, "wench," emphasis mine). While colloquially

history is often used to mean "that which happened in the past," a more accurate

description would be "that which happened in the past *and was written down*." In the

realm of writing and literacy the British had a distinct advantage over the oral culture of

the Fantes, which members of the African Service used to their advantage during

negotiations and disputes:

…[I]n some disputes the local men would bring in witnesses to confirm

the truth of what they claimed. The British could, in many cases, bring out

their ledgers and point to written records of agreements, maybe only

signed with a mark, but attested to as truthful by 'linguists' who straddled

the literacy, language, and skin color divisions. (St Clair 69)

The literacy of the British was not only an advantage during negotiations with the Fante. It also conveyed advantages in the historical record, allowing the British a large degree of control over how narratives about Cape Coast Castle would be disseminated. And the British hardly had motivation to represent the perspective of the Castle's wenches. As St Clair notes, "Of all the people who lived in and around the Castle, the wenches were those that the later colonial histories found most embarrassing" (151). The illiteracy of Fante women combined with a deliberate silencing campaign by scandalized Victorian historians assured that the (white, male) British perspective would be overrepresented in history books while the (black, female) perspective of the wenches appears hardly at all.

The day-to-day existence of the Castle wenches, then, belongs to the category of subjugated knowledge, and the opening chapter of *Homegoing*, which focuses on the lived experience of a Castle wench named Effia, releases this subjugated knowledge through an act of creative narration. Effia is a full person with a history and a richly textured subjectivity. She has agency and some, albeit limited, knowledge of her husband James' role in the Castle and its place in the wider economy. Shortly before James takes her to bed for the first time, Effia realizes how he will earn the money to support her:

> "What's below?" she asked James, and the mangled Fante word that came back to her was "cargo."

> Then, carried up with the breeze, came a faint crying sound. So faint, Effia thought she was imagining it until she lowered herself down, rested her ear against the grate. "James, are there people down there?" she asked.

Quickly, James came to her. He snatched her up from the ground
and grabbed her shoulders, looking straight into her eyes. "Yes," he said
evenly. (17)

James' word, "cargo," accurately describes the people below only insofar as it relates their position in the triangle trade. It describes their position as commodities rather than as subjects. But the crying that Effia hears belies the idea that the people below are simple cargo, like sugar or tea: they are communicating affect, expressing their subjective experience. Like the wenches of the Castle, the chattel slaves will be recorded in the Castle logbooks in terms of expenses and earned revenue. While Effia and Esi have very different positions within the Castle, they are alike in that their subjectivity and agency are subjugated knowledges; when we view the historical record, we find their economic value to the Castle, not their subjective experience. The twin narratives of Effia and Esi, on the other hand, resist the commodification of the Castle wenches by emphasizing their agency and affect.

Through the novel genre, Gyasi can imaginatively construct answers to the questions that St Clair poses and then deems unanswerable. *Homegoing* takes as its object the point where qualified histories fail, where the historical record is irrevocably lost or forgotten. These burials of oral and written history both cause and contribute to the disruption of kinship connections within the novel.

In almost every chapter, a kinship connection is buried along with a history. While I will only be able to focus on some of these chapters in great detail, here I will provide an outline of how this theme surfaces throughout the novel. *Homegoing* contains fourteen chapters and as many central characters; however, in the interest of brevity, here

90

I only list events that cause a massive rupture in the novel's memory, where a traumatic event results in any knowledge of previous generations being lost.

Effia is separated from her mother before the novel's beginning, and has no knowledge of Maame other than that she was a slave and wore a necklace that Effia inherits. Effia's mixed-race son becomes a very successful slave trader, and out of shame in the family business Effia's grandson, James, fakes his own death and runs off to live as a farmer. James does not share his family's history with his daughter Abena, and Abena dies while her daughter Akua is quite young. By the time of Akua's chapter, history has been buried three times: first with Effia's separation from Maame, next with James' self-abduction, and finally with Abena's death at the hands of a Christian missionary. There is no way for Akua to scientifically or historically reconstruct her family connection to Effia, or learn of Effia's life in Cape Coast Castle.

In a parallel series of stories, Esi is separated from her village and her family and shipped to America, where the slave trade and racism both continually disrupt the kinship connections of her descendants. Her daughter, Ness, is sold to another plantation at a very young age. When Ness tries to escape with her family via the underground railroad, she and her husband are caught. Ness' husband Sam is hung and Ness is whipped nearly to death, but her son, Kojo, is taken north by their guide and grows up free but with no memory of his parents. After the passage of the fugitive slave act, Kojo's pregnant wife is abducted despite being born into freedom, and Kojo's son, H., also grows up with no memory of his family. By the chapter of H.'s daughter Willie, history has been buried many times: Ness, Kojo, and H. are all separated from their parents at very young ages, and H. has no way to learn of the Fante culture and language of Esi's memory.

Nevertheless, the characters of *Homegoing* use the tools available to them to attempt to reconstruct a buried past. In Yaw's chapter, we see Yaw at work on a postcolonial history entitled *Let the Africans Own Africa*; however, the chapter does not focus on Yaw's academic ideas, but on his relationship with the woman he loves and with his own mother, who burned his face while experiencing visions. Yaw does not come to terms with his past through his academic writing, but through his intimate domestic relationships. When we encounter Yaw's book in a later chapter, the academic text seems to have absorbed some of Yaw's domestic preoccupations: it is now entitled *The Ruin of a Nation Begins in the Homes of Its People*, after an Asante proverb. While the title *Let the Africans Own Africa* implies a clear binary between Africans and imperial powers, *The Ruin of a Nation Begins in the Homes of Its People* indicates the nuanced relationship between the Asante, the Fante, and the British that can be seen in Yaw's own family line: the reader is aware, although Yaw is not, that he is himself the descendant of a British slave trader. While complicating the simple binary understanding of European slaver/African enslaved, Yaw's book title also alludes to the domestic disruption of the slave trade, which can be seen throughout *Homegoing*. While Effia's marriage gestures towards the cultural entanglement and complicity that enabled the slave trade, Esi's separation from her family, village, and culture speaks for the 9.5 million Africans separated from their family, village, and culture through the transatlantic slave trade (Klein xviii). Far from viewing domesticity as separate from or less than large-scale political violence, *Homegoing* reveals that the transatlantic slave trade was domestic violence on a massive scale. The ruin of a nation begins in the homes of its people.

The horrible intimacy of this large-scale violence is demonstrated by Marcus, the ultimate descendent of Esi's American bloodline, and his attempts to explain his lived experience through academic research. In what functions as a critique of the limits of academic research, Marcus struggles to write his dissertation in an academic setting on a topic that is as personal as it is political:

> Originally, he'd wanted to focus his work on the convict leasing system that had stolen years off of his great-grandpa H's life, but the deeper into the research he got, the bigger the project got. How could he talk about Great-Grandpa H's story without also talking about his grandma Willie and the millions of other black people who had migrated north, fleeing Jim Crow? And if he mentioned the Great Migration… He'd have to talk about Harlem. And how could he talk about Harlem without mentioning his father's heroin addiction---the stints in prison, the criminal record?... And if he started talking about the war on drugs, he'd be talking about how nearly half of the black men he grew up with were on their way either into or out of what had become the harshest prison system in the world. And if he talked about why friend from his hood were doing five-year bids for possession of marijuana when nearly all the white people he'd gone to college with smoked it every day, he'd get so angry that he'd slam the research book on the table of the beautiful but deadly silent Lane Reading Room of Green Library of Stanford University. (289)

In this stream of associated thoughts (which I have heavily abbreviated), Marcus struggles to reconcile his intimate personal knowledge of racism in America as

experienced by himself, his family, and his community, with the stringent methodological requirements of academic research. Marcus strains against the requirement, common to most doctoral dissertations, to study a single topic or event in great detail; no single academic topic aligns with the whole of his lived experience. More poignantly, the academic structures in which he studies, such as the "beautiful but deadly silent Lane Reading Room," are not hospitable to the emotional connection he feels to his research:

> And if he slammed the book down, then everyone in the room would stare and all they would see would be his skin and his anger, and they'd think they knew something about him, and it would be the same something that had justified putting his great-grandpa H in prison, only it would be different too, less obvious than it once was. (289)

There is no space in the academic setting of the reading room for Marcus' emotional response, his rage, over the deeply personal feelings that racism in America elicits. Marcus' attempts to combine the first form of subjugated knowledge, his academic research about racism in America, with the second form, his own informal and personalized knowledge of how racism affects his community, are being stymied by the formal academic environment of a research university, which prizes dispassionate analysis over emotionally engaged, experientially-driven varieties of knowledge formation.

Marcus' academic project is further complicated by its movement through multiple levels of communal knowledge: Marcus' lived experience of racism is inextricably entangled with the communal memory of racial trauma of which *Homegoing* is composed, and is combined with Marcus' academic knowledge of systems of injustice

(Jim Crow, the war on drugs, mass incarceration) that are too large in scale to be experientially understood by an individual. Several overlapping knowledge-forming communities inform Marcus' project: the lore of his family, the cultural knowledge of his community in Harlem, and the systemized knowledge-formation that characterizes communities of scholars at academic universities.

The dissertation Marcus would like to write seems to be something in line with Foucault's concept of genealogy: "we can give the name 'genealogy' to this coupling together of scholarly erudition and local memories, which allows us to constitute a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of that knowledge in contemporary tactics" (Foucault 8). Marcus' scholarly erudition allows him a nuanced understanding of the 'war on drugs,' but his lived personal experience, his "local memories," provide another valuable source of knowledge. If successfully combined in a Foucauldian genealogy, these two subjugated knowledges would "reactivate local knowledges… against the scientific hierarchicalization of knowledge and its intrinsic power-effects" (10). *Homegoing* explicitly critiques the form of the academic dissertation for failing to incorporate relevant forms of knowledge, to behave in a way that is sufficiently genealogical.

I propose that we view *Homegoing* as a text that is genealogical in form and in purpose. Marcus is perceptibly frustrated with the limits of his academic research, its inability to adequately express his own lived experience as well as the breadth of the narrative he wants to express. *Homegoing* is the formal answer to Marcus' frustrations. The narrator of *Homegoing* is able to move seamlessly between a global view of transatlantic history and the personal lives of individual characters. This oscillation

between the global and the local, the academic and the intimate, requires multiple stories and perspectives to exist simultaneously within the text, creating a body of historical knowledge. In *Sankofa*, it is the drummer Sankofa's mediation of the twin narratives of Shola and Mona that give the movie historical scope; rather than a representation of the past, *Sankofa* explores the past's relationship to the present, how history is kept alive and passed on, and how individuals bear the burden of history within a community of witnesses and storytellers. In *Homegoing,* the narrator preserves the history of bloodline that is lost to the individual characters, and as in *Sankofa*, this subjugated knowledge is released, forcing the novel's contemporary characters to reckon with their buried pasts.

Collective Memory as Haunting

The sister narratives of Effia and Esi's bloodlines are linked by thematic resonance. As a slave girl tells Asi, the sister who will be stolen and taken to America: "in my village we have a saying about separated sisters. They are like a woman and her reflection doomed to stay on opposite sides of the pond" (39). The sister narratives in *Homegoing* reflect each other, even as the individual characters remain unaware of their place in a wider narrative. The real work of the novel does not take place within the characters' individual subjectivities; it exists in the moments when the narratives cross over, intersecting in a way that is imperceptible to the characters themselves. These intersections do not depend on character interaction. Instead, *Homegoing* relies on haunting as a vehicle to keep the two family lines in conversation with each other.

Prior to the first appearance of Mona, *Sankofa* opens with an invocation wherein the divine drummer *Sankofa* calls upon the dead to rise. It begins:

> Spirits of the Dead rise up,
>
> Lingering Spirits of the Dead rise up and possess your bird of
> passage.
>
> Those stolen Africans step out of the ocean from the wombs of the
> ships
>
>> and claim your story.
>
> Spirits of the Dead rise up,
>
> Lingering Spirits of the Dead rise up and possess your vessel.
>
> Those Africans shackled in leg irons and enslaved,
>
> Step out of the acres of cane fields and cotton fields and tell your
> story.

Through this invocation, Sankofa asks the dead to assist in the project of unleashing subjugated knowledges. These "Lingering Spirits" are present, capable of telling their stories and possessing vessels, yet in the very next scene, we encounter Mona engaged in the act of forgetting.

What do we call this history that has the potential to be known, that is in some sense very much alive, but is very clearly buried? We might call it trauma. As described by Cathy Caruth, "[t]he traumatized person… carries an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess" (4). While the characters in *Homegoing* never come to entirely possess their historical narrative in its entirety, they are able to partially recover their narrative. In some cases this recovery occurs through academic research, but it also occurs through the "lingering spirit of the dead," with characters connecting to the lives of their ancestors through

dreams, hauntings, and visions. To understand how these knowledge forms operate within the text, I turn to Avery Gordon, one of the few academic theorists to have studied haunting as a form of knowledge formation.

In *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, Avery Gordon undertakes a methodical study of the phenomenon of haunting, which she defines as "an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely" (xvi). Haunting is a means of engaging or working through the traumatic memory which Caruth defines as an unintegrated memory that cannot become "a 'narrative memory' that is integrated into a completed story of the past" (Caruth 419). The original trauma of the narrative, the enslavement of Maame, echoes throughout both family lines, as the family's fragmentation keeps a completed collective narrative from emerging. Gordon uses the word "haunting" to "describe those singular yet repetitive instances when home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearings on the world lose direction, when the over-and-done-with comes alive, when what's been in your blind spot comes into view" (xvi). Haunting is the means by which the characters are continually reminded that their narrative is incomplete. As Avery Gordon notes, "haunting, unlike trauma, is distinctive for producing a something-to-be-done." Through haunting, *Homegoing* continually demands that intergenerational trauma of slavery and forced migration be addressed.

While the term "haunting" as used by Avery Gordon does not necessarily refer to the supernatural, in *Homegoing* the supernatural is one of the many ways that recurrent trauma is addressed. For instance, Akua, the fourth chapter of Effia's bloodline, witnesses a white man being burned alive and begins to have visions. Were this chapter taken in

isolation, a reader might interpret Akua's visions as madness, as her family and neighbors do. However, within the context of the novel, Akua's visions seem revelatory, of mystical or divine origin:

> [God] returned her fear to her every night in horrible nightmares where fire consumed everything, where it ran from the coast of Fanteland all the way into Asante. In her dreams the fire was shaped like a woman holding two babies to her heart. The firewoman would carry these two little girls with her all the way to the woods of the Inland and then the babies would vanish, and the firewoman's sadness would send orange and red and hints of blue swarming every tree and every bush in sight. (177)

The story of Esi's mother, only partially told in Esi's chapter, reappears in the narrative after a long absence. Esi's mother, who within the text is only called Maame ("mother"), reappears in the text as a "firewoman" in Afua's dreams. While Afua does not immediately understand the firewoman's significance, from Esi's chapter the reader knows that Maame was an enslaved woman who escaped by setting a fire in the night, leaving Effia behind. While Maame's marriage to Esi's father rescues her from slavery, her history is stolen; she has "no family, no background to speak of" (35). Maame, the firewoman, gains her freedom before the novel's beginning, but her former enslavement plays a role in the narratives of both Esi and Effia. It is the original trauma that ties two narratives together.

Maame gives birth to Effia while enslaved and raises Esi as a free woman; however, the novel muddies the distinction between slavers and enslaved as the two half-sisters switch destinies. Both bloodlines inherit the institution of slavery, but in radically

different ways. Esi is taken by another tribe and enslaved, while Effia, the child of a slavewoman, marries a white slaver. Esi's bloodline inherits Maame's trauma; her descendants in America suffer the effects of slavery and its aftermath for generations. Effia's descendants remain in Africa and are not enslaved, but slavery and imperialism touches them in more subtle ways.

Take, for instance, the recurrence of scarification throughout the novel. These scars make their first explicit appearance in the story of Quey, the second chapter in the bloodline of Effia. We are told that the people around Cape Coast try to escape the growing slave trade by scarring themselves: "Trade had increased so much, and the methods of gathering slaves had become so reckless, that many of the tribes had taken to marking their children's faces so that they would be distinguishable. Northerners, who were most frequently captured, could have upwards of twenty scars on their faces, making them too ugly to sell" (64). In Quey's chapter, scars demonstrate how deeply the slave trade has affected the area surrounding Cape Coast.

Scars make a parallel appearance in Ness's chapter, the second chapter in the bloodline of Esi: "her scarred skin was like another body in and of itself, shaped like a man hugging her from behind with his arms hanging around her neck…. Ness's skin was no longer skin really, more like the ghost of her past made seeable, physical" (74). For Ness, these scars are a record of her past, valuable when no other form of record exists. Like the Fante traders who were at a disadvantage negotiating with the British, Ness does not have access to the tools of literacy to create her history, yet her past is written indelibly on her body. They are a reminder of her failed attempt to escape a plantation with her husband and child, after which her owner hanged her husband and whipped Ness

nearly to death. Ness has only vague memories of her mother; the scar on her body serves as the only tangible reminder of her family and history, and even her new master cannot erase it. In both parallel instances, scars provide a record of history and memory under a social and economic system where one's history and family may be taken away at any time.

When scars appear again in the narrative, they are once again on the body of a person with no record of his past: H, the fourth chapter of Asi's bloodline, whose free mother was enslaved after the passage of the fugitive slave act. We can assume H was separated from his mother at an early age, as he does not appear to have a memory of her; nor does he know that he was named H because he is the eighth son of a couple who named their children alphabetically (Agnes, Beulah, etc.). But the time he spent as a prisoner working in the mines is written on his back: "It had been nearly twenty-five years since the end of slavery, and free men were not supposed to have fresh scars on their backs, the evidence of a whip" (167). Unlike Ness, H is not grateful for his scars, but they do serve as a record in a life where tangible evidence of history is scarce. The scars on Ness' body within the content of the text mirrors the historical record that is the text in itself.

In the next chapter, the scars resurface across the Atlantic Ocean, landing on Effia's Ghanaian bloodline like a reckoning. Although her family has not been enslaved, Akua has nevertheless lost contact with her past. Akua's grandfather, James, faked his own death to abandon his family's role in the slave trade, and her mother, Abena, was killed by a white missionary who took her in after a shameful pregnancy out of wedlock. Akua is twice-alienated from her impossible history: it is both the history of imperialism

and the slave trade, too large and horrific in scope to be understood, and her personal family history which has been largely erased or forgotten due to the influence of imperialism.

The history of both bloodlines reappears through Akua's visions of the firewoman. These visions resemble an intergenerational flashback, an incredibly vivid scene that cannot be integrated into a narrative and that "literally *has no place*, neither in the past, in which it was not fully experienced, nor in the present, in which its precise images and enactments are not fully understood" (419). However, the visions differ from the standard psychological flashback: they are not literal reenactments of events that have already happened. In the flashbacks known to psychiatry, Caruth notes, "the dreams, hallucinations and thoughts are absolutely literal, unassimilable to associative chains of meaning" (4). In contrast, the vision of the firewoman that causes Akua to burn her children, killing her two daughters and scarring her son's face and her own hands, is heavily symbolic:

> Now in the firewoman's arms were the two fire children that she had held the first time Akua dreamed of her… Akua had the urge to hold them, and she reached out her hands to them. Her hands caught fire, but she touched them still. Soon she cradled them with her own burning hands… And as she held them, the firewoman did not protest. She did not try to snatch them away. Instead, she watched, crying from joy. And her tears were the color of the ocean water in Fanteland… Until the torrent of tears began to put out the fire in Akua's hands. Until the children began to disappear. (197)

Akua's visions of the firewoman refuse any simple 1:1 correspondence with events as they literally occurred. Elements of the family trauma are evident: the fire Maame set in order to escape her enslavement by Effia's father, the water of the Atlantic Ocean that Esi crossed after her capture, and the loss of two children. However, these elements are adapted and retold in a way that is new, and that motivates Akua to set fire to her children and her own hands. Akua is alienated from her history, yet through the vehicle of haunting her family's past is written onto her body and the body of her child, serving as a tangible record of her family's shame. The record within the text, provided by the narrator in the role of historian, is superimposed upon the bodies of the characters; one wonders whether the existence of the text, a preserved record of Effia and Esi's stories, has a role in the haunting.

Akua's vision is perfectly encapsulated by Gordon's description of haunting, "that moment (of however long duration) when things are not in their assigned places… when the people who are meant to be invisible show up without any sign of leaving, when disturbed feelings cannot be put away, when something else, something different from before, seems like it must be done." The "something-to-be-done" in this case is an a reenactment of the traumatic events which have been forgotten: the loss of Maame's two daughters. Akua "writes" Maame's story on the bodies of her children: two of her daughters are burned to death, representing the children that Maame lost, while a third child, Yaw, is forced to carry a reminder of the family's shame in a scar on his face.

Yaw is an intellectual, not a mystic, yet his life's project involves transcribing the scars on his face and the shame that they represent into a written history of Ghana. While Yaw appears to have no more personal reason for writing this history than his Ghanaian

citizenship, the reader can recognize the title of his work, *The Ruin of a Nation Begins in the Homes of Its People*, as an expression of his own complex family history which, unbeknownst to him, produced his facial scars.

Yaw's narrative does the work of transforming Akua's "writing," the representation of history on the bodies of her children, into a literal history of Africa. Yaw's book paves the way for his daughter Marjorie to achieve another level of abstract representation: Marjorie inherits Akua's mystical understanding and expresses it through acts of literary reconstruction similar to Gyasi's own. Although Marjorie has no empirical knowledge of Effia and Esi, the poem she reads at her school's black cultural event tells their story:

> Split the Castle open,
>
> find me, find you.
>
> We, two, felt sand,
>
> wind, air.
>
> One felt whip. Whipped,
>
> once shipped.
>
>
> We, two, black.
>
> Me, you.
>
> One grew from
>
> cocoa's soil, birthed from nut,
>
> skin uncut, still bleeding.
>
> We, two, wade.

The waters seem different

but are the same.

Our same. Sister skin.

Who knew? Not me. Not you. (282)

On a metaphorical level, this poem expresses Marjorie's feelings of separation from her African-American peers. As an immigrant from Ghana, Marjorie struggles with identifying as a black American: "[A]t home, they had a different word for African Americans. *Akata… akata* people were different from Ghanaians, too long gone from the mother continent to continue calling it the mother continent" (273). One one level, then, Marjorie's poem is an acknowledgment of the kinship she shares with her *akata* classmates. The lines "We, two, black" and "Sister skin" indicate a common ancestry as well as a shared American racial identity: as Mrs. Pinkston reminds Marjorie, in the gaze of white America, she and her *akata* classmates are equally black. Marjorie's poem is a perfectly plausible exploration of the complexity of her black racial identity.

However, when taken in conjunction with the dreams and visions of her grandmother Akua, lines of Marjorie's poem stand out as prophetic. "Sister skin" doubles as an allusion to the kinship of Effia and Esi. The line "Who knew? Not me. Not you" indicates the lost knowledge of their kinship, while "Split the Castle open / find me, find you" gestures towards the dramatic irony of Effia and Esi living in the Castle at the same time, in wildly different conditions, with no knowledge of each other's existence. As the poem's final line, "Who knew? Not me. Not you" also speaks to the continuation of the lost kinship connection, the descendents of Effia and Esi who continue to be unaware of their connection to each other.

These interpretations are far from mutually exclusive: in another example of *Homegoing*'s tendency to tangle the intimate with the global and the personal with the political, the reader is encouraged to view the estrangement of Effia and Esi's descendants as representative of the global estrangement between Africans and *akata*.

Just as *Homegoing* moves to imaginatively redress historically silenced voices, through an act of creative justice the text attempts a partial restoration of this global estrangement as Marcus, descended from Esi, and Marjorie, descended from Effia, finally meet within the text. Although Marcus and Marjorie (whose alliterative names mirror those of Esi and Effia) remain ignorant of their relationship to each other, they unknowingly set out on a joint mission to understand their shared family history. They share their respective inherited fears: Marjorie is afraid of fire while Marcus is afraid of water. Marjorie accompanies Marcus to Pratt City, where his ancestor H mined coal in a previous chapter, and Marcus struggles again with the magnitude of representing what has happened to his family:

> It was one thing to research something, another thing entirely to have lived it. To have felt it. How could he explain to Marjorie that what he wanted to capture with his project was the feeling of time, or having been a part of something that stretched so far back, was so impossibly large, that it was easy to forget that she, and he, and everyone else, existed in it—not apart from it, but inside of it. (295-296)

Here Caruth's "impossible history" (Caruth 4) is impossible not only on a scale of the intensity of intimate experience, but also in the "impossibly large" (Gyasi 295) scale of time over which that experience has taken place. The structure and form of *Homegoing* is

itself an answer to Marcus' concerns: while the novel's narrator captures history in its impossible largeness, the experience of the characters maintains an intimate awareness of the individuals who live inside of it.

Finally, Marcus and Marjorie travel to Ghana where they visit Cape Coast Castle together. Although he has never been to Ghana and has no direct experience of the Castle, Marcus panics and flees from the dungeons. Subsequently, Marjorie and Marcus both confront their inherited fears of fire and water, and they swim out into the ocean, retracing Esi's path from the Castle into the Atlantic. In the water, Marjorie places the necklace she inherited from Effia around Marcus' neck. Esi owned an identical necklace, but she lost it in the dungeons before being shipped to America. In offering Marcus her necklace, Marjorie is also offering him the history that he lost when Esi was torn from her home. The narration ends as Marjorie begins to return to the shore—a "homegoing" that Esi never experienced.

Although separated from each other for generations, at *Homegoing*'s end the descendents of Effia and Esi are reunited. Together, they are able to confront their shared history. In addition to combining two separated branches of West African heritage, Marcus and Marjorie combine two forms of subjugated knowledge: Marcus' academic knowledge and Marjorie's indigenous or popular knowledge.

I propose that we view *Homegoing* as a text that is multiply genealogical in both form and purpose. It is genealogical in both the sense that it creates community that spans multiple generations of a family's history and also in the Foucauldian sense: "the tactic which, once it has described these local discursivities, brings into play the desubjugated knowledges that have been released from them" (10-11). This release of desubjugated

knowledges contributes to the creation of a transgenerational community, as the mechanism of haunting allows characters to recover aspects of their lost or buried history. Similarly to the banyan structure I described in the previous chapter, the events of previous chapters are recalled throughout the novel.

However, unlike *The Lowland*, the events of *Homegoing* take place over a timeframe longer than living memory; there is no character alive at the novel's end that could tell you how the narrative began. Neither branch of the family has access to a written account of events, and characters are separated from their parents at a young age with a frequency that precludes the transmission of an oral account. For Marcus and Marjorie to have any memory of Esi and Effia requires that memory not be bound to individual consciousness; it requires a transgenerational, communal memory.

Although the individual characters do not have access to it, this communal memory asserts itself through the narrator, who takes a bard-like role, understanding and memorializing the histories of figures within the family. The protagonist of *Homegoing* cannot be said to be a single character, but the community as a whole: the "family tree" of Effia and Esi's descendants, as exemplified by the narrator who reveals the connections between the seven generations. While each individual chapter of *Homegoing* focuses on an individual branch, the subject of the novel is the tree as a whole. Although depersonalized, the subject position of the narrator who carries communal buried knowledge is at the novel's center.

Homegoing acknowledges individual consciousnesses while simultaneously prioritizing communal knowledge-forms. In so doing, *Homegoing* exploits one of the novel's defining characteristics, the construction and defense of the individuated subject,

while its unorthodox structure and its narrative preoccupation with the transmission of

memory and knowledge challenge the supremacy of individual consciousness.

3.0   CHAPTER 3: TANGIBLE GAINS AND INTANGIBLE LOSSES: MIGRATION IN LAILA LALAMI'S *HOPE AND OTHER DANGEROUS PURSUITS*

Fourteen kilometers," reads the opening line of Laila Lalami's *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (2005). This distance represents the width of the Strait of Gibraltar at its narrowest point. In addition to being an easily traversable body of water, the Strait also serves as the national border between Morocco and Spain and, consequently, a border between Africa and the far wealthier European Union. The Strait is therefore an economic frontier for aspiring migrants, one rich with potentialities both positive and negative, as depicted in the following passage:

> Some days he told himself that the distance was nothing, a brief
> inconvenience, that the crossing would take as little as thirty minutes if the
> weather was good. He spent hours thinking about what he would do once
> he was on the other side, imagining the job, the car, the house. Other days
> he could think only about the coast guards, the ice-cold water, the money
> he'd have to borrow, and he wondered how fourteen kilometers could
> separate not just two countries but two universes. (*Hope* 1)

In this passage, the character Murad moves from discussing the distance in terms of time traversed, "a brief inconvenience," to considering what that distance represents: both

positive economic potential, represented by "the job, the car, the house," and the dangerous journey across the strait here represented by "the coast guards, the ice-cold water, the money he'd have to borrow" (ibid.) Notably, only one of these potential dangers is inherent to the Strait itself; both the coast guards and the required funds are necessitated by the European Union's border control policies.

While the opening chapter of *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* is focused on Murad's perspective, in subsequent chapters the novel travels both forward and backward in time into the perspectives of many other Moroccan characters, many of whom are introduced in the opening chapter sharing a boat with Murad. The novel does not focus on a single figure, nor does it focus solely on the migrants in the boat; rather, it uses the characters in the boat as a focal point for examining community relations in Morocco and how they are affected by the possibility of migration.

Laila Lalami's *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* uses a unique structure and chapter progression to shift the novel's focus from individual characters to the larger themes and conflicts they encounter as a community. However, unlike in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* (2016), the community of migrants in *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* is not held together by an easily definable trait like a shared bloodline, nor are they a community in the sense that live together or regularly interact. Lalami's protagonists' lives only intersect for a single scene at the novel's beginning, as gathered together in an inflatable lifeboat they make the dangerous voyage from Morocco to Spain. The following chapters contain scenes from these characters' lives before the voyage (in Part I) and after (in Part II). There is no conclusion at which the stories converge; it is left to the reader to determine how the narratives relate.

What makes Lalami's work a novel, rather than a collection of interrelated short stories? Each chapter can be read independently of the others, but its classification as a novel implies some formal and thematic unity beyond the occasional reoccurrence of characters. In Benedict Anderson's parlance, there is an imagined community being formed: we are invited to imagine these characters coexisting with each other, even outside of the chapter in which they share the same physical space.

Someone who has not read the novel might posit that these characters share the quality of having migrated from Morocco to Spain. This theory is easily disproved, however; two of the four protagonists never enter Spain in any meaningful way, as they are accosted by border patrol upon arrival and deported back to Morocco. We might then theorize that the unifying principle is that all four characters attempt the journey and are changed in some meaningful way. This is a simple answer based on the one scene that all characters share; I argue, however, that it does not account for the novel's preoccupation with characters such as Larbi Armani who never make the journey themselves, only briefly encountering those who will make it. I argue that the unifying principle is more nuanced: what ties these four narratives together is not the physical journey that is taken on the boat but the participation in a *migration system.*

Contemporary immigration specialists tend to conceive of migration within a systems theory framework. The term "migration system" was founded by the Nigerian geographer Akin Mabogunje in "Systems Approach to a Theory of Rural-Urban Migration" (2010) to describe migratory activity between urban and rural areas within Nigeria, but the systems approach accommodates various forms of transnational migration as well. As with any offshoot of systems theory, the behavior of the whole is

never reduced to the sum of its parts. Migration is not a collection of individual decisions and actions, but an indivisible system; therefore, we cannot understand an individual's decision whether to migrate without knowing how they are located in relation to both the sending and the receiving countries. We might compare this to the examination of an ant swarm, where the actions of an individual ant cannot be effectively analyzed outside of the context of the swarm. Mabogunje recognized that those who migrate communicate their experiences to those they left at home, creating positive or negative feedback loops wherein others decide whether or not to migrate based on their experiences. As de Haas notes in "North African Migration Systems: Evolution, Transformations and Development Linkages" (2008):

> [O]nce migration systems are established, migration movements gain their own momentum, partially or even largely independent of their immediate causes. Initial migration patterns tend to be reproduced… giving rise to migration systems that link places in countries of origin and destination through relatively stable exchanges of people, goods, capital (remittances), ideas and information. In particular, migrant networks tend to facilitate continuing labour, family and undocumented migration over formally closed borders. (De Haas 48)

As a result these migration systems are not unidirectional: "The fundamental assumption of migration-systems theory is that migration alters the social, cultural, economic and institutional conditions at both the sending and receiving ends – that is, the entire developmental space within which migration processes operate" (32).

Mabogunje conceived of migration systems as the collection of forces that would compel an individual to migrate or to stay put; however, subsequent migration theorists have noted that the decision to migrate is generally not made by individuals, but by households. According to Immanuel Wallerstein in *World Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (2008), "a typical household consists of three to ten persons who, over a long period (say thirty years or so), pool multiple sources of income in order to survive collectively" (32). Migration, therefore, is often more than an individual decision; it contributes to the collective survival of the household, as De Hass and Fokema demonstrate (2010). De Haas and Fokema warn against treating these households as monolithic entities, noting that "household-centered migration theories… tend to 'reify' the household, that is, to construct it as an entity, with clear plans, strategies, and aims, one that makes unanimous decisions" (543). A nuanced understanding of migration must not only take into account the various communities within which migrants are embedded—the migration system, the household, and others—but in addition must recognize the internal complexity and lack of uniformity of these systems.

A migration systems approach, which emphasizes the relationship of the individual migrant to their family and community, demonstrates the permeability of borders and the impossibility of adequately "defending" them from encroaching migrants. An individual migrant, for example, can be stopped at the Spanish-Moroccan border; so can a series of individual migrants. But the Spanish-Moroccan transnational migration system is an existential challenge to the concept of the border as a spatial boundary that creates an "us" and a "them." The community created by the migration system reveals that Spain and Morocco are already interdependent; the border is porous

because of the economic and interpersonal interdependencies that cross the border. Physical migration between Morocco and Spain is only one aspect of a multi-faceted entanglement.

While Faten, Halima, Aziz, and Murad only briefly share physical space in the boat, for the novel's entirety they are immersed in a shared migration system in which people and goods are traveling between Morocco and the E.U., a community where the journey from Morocco to Spain is possible. Part I of the novel is laced with rumors, whispers, and reports of "the people who'd made it" (*Hope* 107), as well of horror stories of those who did not. Halima receives occasional remittances from her brothers working in France, and wonders "what would have happened if she, too, had gone to Europe like her brothers. Would she have an apartment, a washing machine, maybe even a car?" (71). For the communities depicted in *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, migration is as much a part of life as marriage, religion, and education.

Laila Lalami is widely regarded to be the most influential Moroccan author writing in English today. This claim is bolstered by the fact that for Moroccan authors, who have access to the great literary traditions of both French and Arabic, writing in English is an unusual choice. In her essay "So to Speak" (2009), Lalami explains that while her earliest works were written in French, she later came to realize that "writing in French came at a cost; it inevitably brought with it a colonial baggage that I no longer wanted to carry" (20). She believed both that "her Arabic was not good enough to allow [her] to produce a novel" and that "If [she] could not write in Arabic, perhaps [she]

should not be writing at all," creating a quandary which Lalami refers to as "a peculiar case of writer's block" (ibid.).

Lalami's solution was to write in English. She explains:

I noticed that the linguistic shift enabled me to approach my stories with a fresh perspective. Because English had not been forced upon me as a child, it seemed to give me a kind of salutary distance. The baggage that, to me, seemed inherent in the use of French to tell a Moroccan story seemed to lessen when I used English to tell the same story. (ibid.)

It may strike some as ironic that Lalami disavowed her colonial language only to rush to the embrace of another, more widely-used colonial language; however, as Lalami implies above, English is not a colonial language when taken in the context of a Moroccan novel. The English did not colonize Morocco, nor did they forcibly convert the Moroccan people to write in their language. When Lalami writes in English, she is specifically escaping the literary imperialism of the French that dominated her childhood, in which "none of the characters in [French] books looked or spoke like anyone [she] knew" (19).

After *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits,* Lalami went on to write two other novels: *Secret Son* (2009), a novel about a businessman's illegitimate son facing an economic dead end in the slums of Casablanca which explores class stratification in Morocco, and *The Moor's Account* (2014)*,* a fictionalized memoir of the Moroccan slave who accompanied Cabeza de Vaca on his journey through the Americas. All three of Lalami's published novels depict one or more lower-class Moroccans who are transported across national or economic boundaries—in some cases, both—and are transformed as a result of globalization. *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* is a fitting

overture for Lalami's body of work, as it uses a range of Moroccan characters and locations to depict many of Lalami's themes, from lower-class Moroccan life to globalization to storytelling as a means of liberation.

For so short a text, *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* provides a complex and multifaceted depiction of the Moroccan economy and its precarity: dependent on the money of wealthy foreign tourists, saturated by foreign goods, and experiencing a "brain drain" of the wealthy and educated. The lack of manufacturing and industry is indicated by the number of Moroccans driving "French and German cars… while their stereos [blast] American music" (*Hope* 90). The chapters in Part I focused on Aziz and Murad illustrate the difficulty of finding a job in Morocco as a young man. Aziz is unemployed, although his wife has a factory job. Aziz's friend Lahcen buys phone minutes and resells individually for a profit, earning "enough to [pay] for his bus fares and his cigarettes" (78). Murad has a a similarly unreliable source of revenue; he sells his services as a freelance tour guide, but "[t]hese days… the guides outnumbered the tourists and Murad found little work" (95). Even for women, without a strong scholastic record finding a job is nearly impossible, as Larbi's daughter Noura reports when worried about her friend Faten's economic prospects: "There are so many unemployed college graduates, but without a diploma, her chances of ever finding a job… It's so unfair…" (49) Before the four protagonists set foot on the Zodiac that will take them across the Strait, they are already jointly participating in the Moroccan economy, which plays a role in all of their stories.

For most Moroccans, migrating across national borders is difficult and dangerous; however, for Westerners who wish to travel abroad, Morocco's borders are very

permeable. Tourism is the second largest contributor to national GDP and is particularly

dominant in port cities like Tangier (Kasraoui). According to the World Travel and

Tourism Council, tourism was directly or indirectly responsible for 16.4% of Moroccan

employment—nearly two million jobs—in 2017.[26] There is an irony to the story of

Murad, whose failure to migrate to the E.U. keeps him trapped in low-level working in

the tourism industry, catering to Westerners who are able to enter and leave Morocco at

will. In the novel's final chapter, two Anglophone tourists enter the shop where Murad

works in search of a wedding gift for a cousin. While in the uncomfortable position of

having to cater to the tourists for his economic livelihood, Murad listens to disparaging

remarks about his culture. The tourists examine historic tablets used in Quranic schools

before the 1940s and are unable to read the writing or identify its provenance. they

pronounce "I just love how the letters curve" and "It's an antique, I think" (*Hope* 171).

While speaking of Paul Bowles, a well-known expatriate author who lived in Morocco,

one of the tourists asserts that he knew Morocco "Better than the Moroccans themselves"

(174). The tourists admire the surface-level beauty of Moroccan culture, yet their

comments demonstrate their insubstantial understanding.

Murad does not confront the women directly, and while it appears that the reader

has free access to Murad's thoughts, from nostalgic reveries about his childhood to bitter

reminiscences about his failed journey to Spain, he noticeably does not reflect on the

women who enter his shop, only offering surface-level observations: one of them has "a

burlap bag whose strap crossed her chest, separating her breasts" (169-170), while the

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[26] For more about the tourism industry in Morocco, see World Travel and Tourism
Council (2018).

other's "blue shirt was stained under her arms" (170). However, Murad's actions reveal a veiled resistance towards the tourists and what they represent.

When the women enter the shop, Murad does not reveal that he understands English. He eavesdrops on the women while pretending to be immersed in the book he's reading, which is itself an Anglophone representation of Tangier that Murad borrowed from the American Language Center. Murad is critical of the work, unable "to reconcile the fictional world he was reading about with the one he experienced every day" (168). When Murad reveals that he speaks English, it is to tell the tourists a story that seems innocuous on its face but, like Murad, harbors a veiled hostility towards Western tourists.

In the story, the Sultan hears of a beautiful woman promised to a rug weaver and tells his faithful servant Arbo "How can a rug weaver have a more beautiful wife than I? Do what you must" (182). The woman Jenara is taken into the Sultan's harem, where she spends her days crying. The rug weaver cannot fight the all-powerful Sultan, so he pours his sorrow into a beautiful rug that shows "Jenera in all her beauty, her face unveiled, and in her hand a long knife, representing her desire for revenge" (ibid.). Hearing of the rug, the Sultan takes it and hangs it in his bedroom; Jenara then breaks into his room with a knife, and when the Sultan cries out in terror and his courtiers run in, she uses the rug as camouflage to avoid detection. After the courtiers leave, "shaking their head over their master who'd gone mad," Jenara "finally brought the knife to the Sultan's throat and killed him" (184).

Murad's audience does not realize that they have been cast in the role of the Sultan, an incredibly wealthy person who must possess all beautiful things, especially those that do not rightfully belong to him. Emphasizing this point, one of the tourists

119

decides to purchase a rug and bring it back with her to her Anglophone country, like the Sultan enclosing Jenara in his palace. But Murad leaves open the possibility of resistance, which in his narrative is made possible through lovingly crafted art. Within this context, Murad's decision to "start writing" his own stories can clearly be seen as an act of resistance against both the book he is reading and the two foreign tourists he serves, as well as what those categories represent. The hope that inspired Murad in his attempt to emigrate is the same hope that now inspires him to become a storyteller; however, rather than looking into the future to escape present injustices, Murad now turns towards the stories of his past, an act of resistance against globalization and foreign influence.

Murad chooses to tell the stories from his childhood in a global tongue to Anglophone tourists—a choice similar to Lalami's decision to write about Morocco in English for a global audience. With his unusual MA in English, the character Murad is a means for Lalami to explore the limited choices of writers from the global South, who must choose between the localized colonial language and the language of global domination, or else sharply delimit their potential audience by writing in an indigenous language. There is a sense in which Murad does finally migrate, but he does so linguistically, using a foreign language and speaking to a global audience. In the novel's final chapter, Murad's decision to engage in the dangerous pursuit of hope through narrative is an act of globalized resistance to an oppressive global system.

In fact, all four of the migrants at the center of *Hope…* are engaging in acts of resistance, if not against globalization itself then against the economic conditions that it has produced in Morocco. Paradoxically, one form this resistance can take is the act of

migration, a dangerous pursuit which reveals the hypocrisy in a global network where goods and money can freely cross borders but labor cannot. The illicit attempted crossing into Spain at the novel's opening is both a concrete solution to the needs of individuals and, more broadly, a desperate attempt to rectify the asymmetry created by selectively porous borders which allow goods to freely circulate while constricting the flow of labor. Furthermore, as Murad's story demonstrates, Morocco's borders confine most of the Moroccan population to an economic dead end while allowing Western tourists free passage through the country.

The chapter at the beginning of Part I, entitled "The Fanatic," is from the perspective of a man who is not one of our four central migrants and does not appear in any other chapter. While one of the migrants, Faten, appears in the chapter and plays an active role, the perspective is that of Larbi Amrani, a wealthy Moroccan employed by the government who does not suffer from asymmetrical globalization's negative effects and is actively complicit in reinforcing the status quo. Throughout the chapter Larbi is affected by asymmetrical globalization and the migration system in unpredictable ways, demonstrating that one does not have to migrate to take part in a migration system.

"The Fanatic" reveals that while migration is pervasive across class lines in Morocco, one's economic and social class determine the means by which one will migrate. Larbi's son has a student visa and studies abroad in Québec, and his daughter has been provisionally accepted at NYU; most of her friends from her private *lycée* are already studying abroad. This is a far cry from the illicit boat travel seen in the opening chapter, and one can assume that not all of these student *emigrées* will return home after they've received their degrees. While Larbi believes that his son Nadir will eventually

return from Canada, and dreams of the position Nadir will get "with an engineering degree… from abroad" (*Hope* 23), there is no indication that Nadir will return to Morocco, and the distance he feels from his family is apparent: "Nadir sent only hurried e-mails with scant details of college life. Whenever he wrote real letters, it was to ask his parents for money" (22). Lahcen asserts in a later chapter that "No one comes back" (76) from Europe.

Larbi supports his family's standard of living with "the occasional bribe" (21), and his corruption is a source of guilt and shame for him as he grapples with the role of Islam in his secular family's lifestyle. The chapter opens with broken prayer beads and a description of Larbi's fading faith:

> His mother had given him the sandalwood beads on his college graduation, shortly before her death, advising him to use them often. At first Larbi had carried the beads in his pocket, fingered them after every prayer, but as the years went by he'd reached for them with decreasing regularity, until one day they ended up as decoration in his car. Now they lay scattered, amber dots on the black floor mats. (19)

Larbi considers the broken beads to be an ill omen, and in a way he is correct; they foreshadow the fracturing of Larbi's secular, cosmopolitan household as his daughter Noura gravitates towards Islamism. The resulting disputes between Noura and her parents synecdochally represent the fractured nation of Morocco, with Larbi and his wife defending the values of secular, progressive, cosmopolitan Moroccans while Noura and her less wealthy classmate Faten speak for the religiously conservative lower classes.

Noura's decision to wear the hijab provokes a heated debate with her parents, with Noura arguing for a literal interpretation of the Quran: "If you disagree with the hijab, you're disagreeing with God" (33). Noura's mother engages with Noura's arguments, endorsing a more liberal interpretation of the Quran: "There are only two verses that refer to the headscarf. You should take them in context" (33). Larbi, by contrast, ridicules his daughter's beliefs, but his focus is not on formulating a religious argument, but on what his daughter's choice to wear the hijab says about his family's image:

> His only daughter, dressed like some ignorant peasant! But even peasants didn't dress like that. She wasn't wearing some traditional country outfit. No, she wanted the accoutrements of the new breed of Muslim Brothers: headscarf tightly folded around her face, severe expression anchored in her eyes. His precious daughter. She would look like those rabble-rousers you see on live news channels, eyes darting, mouths agape, fists raised. (34)

Larbi's first impulse to refer to his daughter as a "peasant" is telling; for an upper-class, cosmopolitan, secular family, choosing to wear the hijab is socially and aesthetically incorrect. Larbi then corrects himself and says that his daughter's choice to wear the hijab is worse than wearing "some traditional country outfit" (ibid.). It is not only déclassé but political; it aligns her with organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood, here positioned as "rabble-rousers," the enemy of the globalized cosmopolitan elite who, like Larbi, cooperate with the Moroccan government and the international order. While consternation about the hijab is frequently presented as a desire to liberate Muslim

women, Larbi's disdain for the hijab is openly patriarchal; his references to Noura as "his precious daughter" and "his only daughter" clearly demonstrate his sense of ownership over her, muddying any 1:1 correspondence between fundamentalist Islam and patriarchal entitlement in Moroccan culture.

Like migration, fundamentalist Islam is positioned in the text as an alternative to asymmetrical globalization. We see this also in Laila Lalami's *Secret Son*, where the character Maati is the only one of his friends to find employment through his membership in an anti-government Islamic organization. Islamism enters both texts as an alternative to globalization for disaffected Moroccan youth and an outlet for channeling frustration at its failures. Noura's decision to wear the hijab aligns her with lower-class Moroccans and becomes a source of shame for her father: "[Larbi] felt it was beneath someone like him to have a daughter in a headscarf, and he provided only terse answers to anyone at the Ministry who asked him about his daughter" (38). In a later scene, Noura's friend Faten is invited to dinner, where Larbi is "satisfied to notice evidence of less-than-genteel upbringing" (41), further cementing his view that Faten is too lower-class to associate with his daughter. Faten is polite to Larbi's family's maid at dinner and calls her by her name, Mimouna. When Larbi, who continues to mentally refer to Mimouna as "the maid," calls her for more water, he notices that she refills Faten's glass but not his, a silent expression of class solidarity with Faten. Faten and Mimouna are members of the class that asymmetrical globalization hurt the most, in sharp contrast to Larbi and his family.

While at dinner, Faten's anti-globalism is placed on trial, with Larbi attempting to reveal her hypocrisy to Noura. During this exchange Faten describes the number of

Moroccan youth who are being educated overseas in terms of the loss for Morocco: "I think it's a shame that we always value foreign degrees over ours. We're so blinded by our love for the West that we're willing to give them our brightest instead of keeping them here where we need them" (43). This is the other side of the Western fear that immigrants will use the resources of their destination country and not give anything back; here Faten expresses the opposite concern, that emigrants will not give back to their nation of origin. Faten's concerns have some basis in fact, at least regarding the extent to which the destination country will profit. As Cati Coe notes in *The Scattered Family* (2014), "Migrants are a less costly source of labor [for the host country] because most migrants migrate when they are already adult and in the prime of their working lives (ages twenty to forty-five). Other governments to which an employer in the destination country does not pay taxes supported their care and education as children" (Coe 8). Meanwhile, Morocco has a surplus of "unskilled" labor, but its educated labor force who have the means to go abroad continue to drain out of the country.

Over his wife's protests, Larbi insists that his children attend expensive foreign-run institutions rather than the school system that he manages. His lack of faith in the institutions of his own country is clear in his willingness to accept bribes, despite his guilt which is symbolized by the prayer beads; when he looks at them he "[cannot] help but think about his mother, for whom virtue and religion went hand in hand, about a time when he, too, believed that such a pairing was natural" (50). The moralizing of Faten, Noura, and even Larbi's wife Salma cause Larbi to feel guilt about his own corruption. While Larbi does not connect his corruption to the system of global capitalism that

125

dominates the text, its placement among other stories encourages the reader to view Larbi as complicit in an unequal and corrupt global system.

The opposing forces of global capitalism and religious fundamentalism have long been thought of as modernity and anti-modernity, with perhaps the most notable example being Benjamin Barber's *Jihad Vs. McWorld* (1993). In *Jihad Vs. McWorld* Benjamin Barber examines "[t]he collision between the forces of disintegral tribalism and reactionary fundamentalism I have called Jihad (Islam is not the issue) and the forces of integrative modernization and aggressive economic and cultural globalization I have called McWorld (for which America is not solely responsible)" (xii). While Barber acknowledges that the forces are "dialectic[ally] interdependent" (ibid.), I would like to further muddy the waters by suggesting that religious fundamentalism is often globalization in another disguise, and Faten's fundamentalist Islamism is no exception. From the time of its birth Islam has been a radically globalist and expansionist doctrine, and neither the Quran nor the Sayyid Qutb book that Larbi finds in Noura's room is Moroccan in origin. In addition, we see Noura participating in Islamic popular culture, watching a tv show called "*Ask the Mufti.*" While Faten and Noura turn to Islamism to escape the failures of global capitalism, their escape into a form of global tribalism is perhaps not as revolutionary as they hope.

In both *Hope…* and *Secret Son*, globalization causes material inequalities that create a lower class of hopeless and unemployed youth who are then attracted to Islamism. They turn to religious fundamentalism to find community, hope, purpose, and self-respect—it can even, as with Maati in *Secret Son*, become a source of livelihood. The same drive to survive that causes Faten to look for meaning in Islamism later

prompts her to survive as a prostitute in Spain. While seemingly ironic and contradictory, Faten's turn to prostitution is a but natural and inevitable consequence of her drive to survive in a changed environment.

For better or for worse, the community depicted in *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* is deeply interdependent with a rapidly globalizing world—and whether it is, in fact, for better or for worse is a question that strikes close to the novel's heart.

For a novel which has been lauded for "complicat[ing] mainstream representations of migrants as unwelcome guests or threatening Others" (Marchi 604), *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* takes a surprisingly dim view of the economic benefits of migration, to such an extent that Stella Borg Barthet argues in "After Africa" (2017) that "[t]he two [characters] who remain in Spain end up in poverty or prostitution (Faten, Aziz); the two who are made to return home manage to finally make a success of their lives (Murad, Halima)" (Barthet 33). In "The Dislocation of 'Home' in the Writings of Laila Lalami" (2014), Abdellah Elboubekri offers a similar, if more nuanced, observation: "Aziz and Faten demonstrate that the arrival at the immigration land is not an end in itself. It is a step toward developing a transnational sensitivity that paves the way for the critique of Western as well as traditional Moroccan constrictive worldviews and corrupt ruling class" (Elboubekri 254). While a purely economic analysis depicts international migration as a net positive even in a world where wealthy nation-states jealously guard their borders, in *Hope…* Lalami demonstrates some of migration's intangible costs.

It is easy to measure the economic benefits of international migration. As the

World Bank observes in its report *Moving for Prosperity : Global Migration and Labor

Markets* (2018), "[a]lmost every empirical study finds that increased labor mobility leads

to large gains for the immigrants and positive overall gains for the destination country"

(World Bank 2). In fact, the existing data suggests that increasing global labor migration

would have a monumentally positive effect on global economic prosperity: "If we were

to double the number of immigrants in high-income countries by moving 100 million

young people from developing countries, the annual income gain would be $1.4 trillion.

This global welfare gain dwarfs the gains from the removal of all restrictions on

international flows of goods and capital" (1). An impartial observer looking at the

numbers would come to the conclusion that international immigration should be

encouraged as much as possible; few policy changes offer an economic impact so clearly

positive.

Yet migration can negatively impact a society as well, in ways which are not

always as easily measured. Many of the stories in *Hope and other Dangerous Pursuits*

take a more melancholy view of migration, focusing on intangible losses. Aziz's story,

for instance, is focused on his many interpersonal relationships. His chapter in Part I

opens with Aziz already having visited "two sets of aunts and uncles, four friends, and

several neighbors" (*Hope* 74). He is close to his parents, to his wife Zohra, and to his best

friend Lahcen. The bulk of the chapter is focused on Aziz and Lahcen's strong friendship,

how they worry about each other and try to help each other; Lahcen tries to find Aziz a

job so he won't feel the need to leave for Spain, while Aziz tries to make Lahcen less

conspicuously gay, attempting to fix him up him up with a girl and giving him shirts that

"he thought… would be better for Lahcen than those tank tops he always wore to show off his biceps" (89). In this brief chapter we see that Aziz has relationships that are precious to him, and that he is part of a community that values him. What makes the situation untenable is Aziz's inability to find work; while he is valued by his community, he is not valued within the Moroccan economy or consequently by his in-laws who "[nag] Zohra about his joblessness" (76), and that knowledge is having an intolerable effect on his self-worth. He leaves Morocco to escape a bleak future, "the prospect of years of idleness, years of asking [his parents] for money to ride the bus, years of looking down at his shoes or changing the subject whenever someone asked what he did for a living" (79). In the process, however, he sacrifices a potential future as part of his community.

In Aziz's Part II, "Homecoming," Aziz discovers that there is no return to the home he left. His father has died; Lahcen, with whom he fell out of contact, has moved to Marrakesh; he didn't know about his mother's blood pressure medicine or the neighbor's daughter whom Zohra has befriended. Perhaps most troublingly, his marriage to his wife is irrevocably altered, as he realizes the first time they make love:

> Being with her brought to mind the women he had slept with while he was
> gone… Now he wondered what his wife would look like in a sexy bustier,
> straddling him, her arms up in the air, moaning her pleasure out loud. He
> couldn't imagine Zohra doing it. But maybe she would, if he asked her. He
> came out of her and put his arm under her so he could scoop her up and
> put her on top of him, but she raised her head and gripped his arms in
> panic. (163)

The different sexual norms in Spain have changed Aziz' desire for his wife and what he expects from their marriage, creating a dissonance in their sexual relations that did not exist before. He inability to even imagine Zohra in the place of the Spanish women anticipates his anxieties about Zohra fitting into his life in Spain, just as Aziz is now unable to fit into the space he held in his community before he left for Spain. Over the course of the two weeks Aziz spends in Casablanca, he becomes increasingly frustrated at the life he is expected to lead:

> By the start of his second week in Casablanca… he found little… to do. The movie theaters showed films he'd already seen. He'd have liked to go to a nightclub, but he couldn't imagine Zohra going with him or even letting him go. Most of the programs on TV bored him, and unlike all their neighbors, Zohra refused to have a satellite dish. "No need to bring filth into the house, there's enough of it on the street" was how she put it. So he sat at home, on the divan, and waited for time to pass. (166)

While it would be possible for Aziz to find something to do in Casablanca (go to a nightclub, watch satellite TV), he is unable to fit into his life with Zohra. As with their sexual encounter, Aziz' morals and identity have shifted to accommodate his environment in Spain. He has become accustomed to the freedom and autonomy that comes with separation from one's family, and unused to having restrictions on how he spends his time. In fact, in Spain, Aziz seems unmoored from any community at all; when asked "Did you make friends?" he

> mention[s] his neighbor, who ha[s] always been kind to him, and his boss at the restaurant. But he didn't talk about the time when he was in El Corte

Ingles shopping for a jacket and the guard followed him around as if he

were a criminal. He didn't describe how, at the grocery store, cashiers

greeted customers with hellos and thank yous, but their eyes always gazed

past him as though he were invisible… (155)

Aziz' gains are easy to measure: a man who used to ask his parents for bus money returns

to Casablanca with fifty thousand dirhams. Yet while the dirhams have been gained,

something has undeniably been lost. Aziz no longer fits seamlessly into the loving

community he left behind, nor can he imagine Zohra as a part of his life in Spain. By any

World Bank measurement Aziz' migration has been a success, yet the chapter ends with

Zohra crying as Aziz leaves to return to Spain as an atomized individual, his "suitcase…

feel[ing] lighter than when he arrived" (167). Aziz has been forced to abandon his fantasy

of a triumphant return; as Rushdie notes in *Imaginary Homelands* (1991), outside of

one's imagination, there can be no returning to what one has left behind.

Hope… does not settle the question of whether migration is the correct decision,

although on the whole the picture of migration that it paints is bleak. Still, we do not see

Aziz regretting his decision to migrate, or even considering the counterfactual scenario in

which he remained in Morocco—it is as if migration were the only path available. And

this is *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*' true verdict on migration: for better or for

worse, it is inevitable. First Lalami shows what the migrants risk, the money they pay and

the danger they face. In Part I we see why they were desperate enough to take the risk,

while in Part II we see how little they stand to gain. Yet migration continues to occur.

In *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits,* as in contemporary migration studies, the

decision to migrate cannot be reduced to the economic "push and pull" factors affecting a

single individual. To understand the decision to migrate, Lalami's novel asserts, we must understand migrants within their familial, societal, and political contexts. Their most significant gains and losses occur within those contexts. Aziz' decision to migrate is tied to his economic worth in the eyes of his community and is affected by his participation in a system of "relatively stable exchanges of people, goods, capital (remittances), ideas and information," reminding us of de Haas' observation that "migration movements gain their own momentum" (De Haas 48). While Lalami's four protagonists have individual reasons for their decision to migrate, all exist in a globalized world characterized by goods and remittances from outside of Morocco and the circulation of labor between Morocco and the E.U. Whether or not the individual characters successfully migrate, they are jointly participating a community with a porous border, affected by an entrenched migration system.

4.0   CHAPTER 4: WHEN STATES AND LANGUAGE FAIL: PATRICIA SCHONSTEIN PINNOCK'S *SKYLINE*

In *Human Rights Inc.* (2007) Joseph Slaughter argues that the Western citizen-subject holds a set of contradictory beliefs about human rights, and the *Bildungsroman* genre emerges as a "solution" to this paradoxical set of beliefs:

> The virtue that literature is traditionally understood to hold over law is its capacity to represent contradiction and paradox without a professional disciplinary obligation to offer a logical resolution—without a compulsion to decide in favor of one or another party. This capacity to sustain ambiguity and complexity makes the *Bildungsroman* a powerful ally in naturalizing the law's paradoxes and exclusions—that is, in normalizing the law's intolerable (in its own juridical terms) ambiguity and ambivalence and in making its contradictions commonsensical. (*Human Rights Inc.* 43-44)

As Slaughter argues, the contradictions that the *Bildungsroman* normalizes are those surrounding the individuated subject of human rights. This subject is born with rights according to natural law, yet situationally, through the communal structures that we subjects have designed, these rights are often violated. How is it that individuated subjects already possess these rights at birth, yet spend their lifetimes in avid pursuit of these same rights that they supposedly already possess? For Slaughter, the

Bildungsroman arises to make sense of human rights discourse and all of its contradictions.

The African *Bildungsroman* is further tasked with synthesizing the individualistic values of liberalism and the communal focus of African storytelling—or so literary criticism has assumed. The South African critic F. Fiona Moolla, in her book *Reading Nuruddin Farah : the Individual, the Novel & the Idea of Home* (2014), observes how this expectation applies to African novels in particular:

> The emergence of the novel from Africa… tends to suffer from an enormous philosophical burden. Analyses of the African novel broadly construct an evolutionary paradigm in terms of which African orality, which comes to symbolise the collective outpouring of the communal spirit, develops into individual expression articulated through writing, in particular, the novel. (Moolla 2)

For Moolla, not only is the postcolonial African *Bildungsroman* novel tasked with reconciling the contradictions surrounding the individuated subject as per Slaughter, it also carries the related "philosophical burden" of harmoniously integrating the individuated subject of the *Bildungsroman* with communal structures. According to this literary paradigm, an examination of the African *Bildungsroman* must take into account how it resolves, or fails to resolve, the tension between the individual striving for self-actualization (commensurate with the *Bildungsroman* genre) and the communal structures that the individual navigates over the course of the novel.

The protagonist of the classic *Bildungsroman* locates herself specifically within the community of the nation-state. As Moolla notes, "It is no coincidence that the

eighteenth century, the age of the classical Bildungsroman, is also the age of the birth of the modern nation-state… This type of novel (and the novel generally) evolves in a national space and provides the plot for the incorporation of marginal subjects into the national imaginary" (55-6). For Joseph Slaughter, as for Benedict Anderson before him, the novel genre is nation-forming. While man is purportedly being built both as an individual instance and as a universal truth he is also, as Slaughter writes in his essay ""Enabling Fictions and Novel Subjects: The 'Bildungsroman' and International Human Rights Law" (2006), being built through "a project of civicization, the cultivation of a presumably inherent universal force of human personality (*Bildungstrieb*) naturally inclined to express itself through the media of the nation-state and citizenship ("Enabling Fictions" 1409). Over the course of the *Bildungsroman*, the protagonist becomes the citizen she (or more usually, he) was always meant to be by right.

According to Jed Esty in his book *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development* (2012), the German idealist structures that form the foundation of the *Bildungsroman* are so rooted in the "novelistic heartland of the European nation-state" (Esty 2) that when they are moved to Empire's colonial periphery they begin to disintegrate: "These are places where imperialism—in its late and bloated form—unsettles the bildungsroman and its humanist ideals, producing jagged effects on both the politics and the poetics of subject formation" (ibid.). In *Unseasonable Youth*, Esty examines a number of colonial novels which have generally been analyzed as *Bildungsroman* and finds that the protagonists never achieve maturity and stasis; in these novels, Esty argues, colonial subjectivity fails to mature into self-possession. Esty finds that the promise of the *Bildungsroman*, the protagonist's emergence as a fully-formed

citizen, is eternally deferred in the novels of Kipling and Conrad. Whereas "[i]n the traditional bildungsroman, youth drives narrative momentum until adulthood arrives to fold youth's dynamism into a conceit of uneventful middle age" (18), the canonical modernist novels that Esty examines do not "narrate the passage into adulthood" but instead "[seem] designed precisely to avoid it" (3):

> In open and sustained violation of the developmental paradigm that seemed to govern nineteenth-century historical and fictional forms, such novels tend to present youthful protagonists who die young, remain suspended in time, eschew vocational and sexual closure, refuse social adjustment, or establish themselves as evergreen souls via the tender offices of the *Kunstlerroman.* (3)

If the *Bildungsroman*, as Slaughter and Moolla argue, holds the psychic burden of illustrating the development of the citizen-subject and reconciling their individual subjectivity with communal structures, what does it mean for this project to be left incomplete? What shall we do with a literary subjectivity that never comes into full possession of its human rights as an individual citizen-subject?

In this chapter, I transplant Esty's argument, which focuses on modernist colonial novels, into a postcolonial context: post-Apartheid South Africa. In South African author Patricia Schonstein Pinnock's *Skyline* (2000), the citizen under construction is an unnamed white girl who lives with her mother and sister in the eponymous Skyline, a run-down block of apartments in central Cape Town that houses a diverse and ever-increasing pool of migrants and refugees from across Africa. The protagonist's father has recently left, and her mother has resorted to drinking heavily rather than caring for her

two children: the unnamed protagonist, who is also our narrator, and Mossie, her

neurodivergent sister who is effectively mute. Bereft of parental guidance, the two sisters

are unable to assimilate into white middle-class South African society; instead they are

collectively parented by the migrants and refugees who populate Skyline, with whom

they share a sense of alienation and deep personal loss.

Historically, the postcolonial *Bildungsroman* has been used by authors of color

and particularly women of color to, as Maria Karafilis argues in "Crossing the Borders of

Genre" (1998), "'affirm and assert' the complex subjectivities of their characters and, by

extension, themselves" (Karafilis 63). To claim complex subjectivity is, by the

Bildungsroman's own logic, to also claim validity as a citizen-subject entitled to human

rights. In my previous chapters, I have discussed novels where national citizenship is not

a sufficient category for the exploration of personal identity: Jhumpa Lahiri's *The*

Lowland (2013) mines the hyphenated identity of Indian Americans; Yaa Gyasi's

Homegoing (2016) depicts black identity and consciousness as transnational and

transatlantic; and in Laila Lalami's *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (2005),

Moroccan identity *is* a global identity, shaped and defined by the global economy. None

of these novels adheres neatly to the *Bildungsroman* structure. In these novels, as I have

demonstrated, the project of troubling the category of the nation-state is intimately

connected to disrupting the category of the individual, thereby revealing the connections

and networks that transgress national borders. Subverting the structure of the

Bildungsroman is one method by which authors of postcolonial novels achieve this.

Unlike the other novels I've examined, however, *Skyline* appears to be a *Bildungsroman*:

it tells the story of a defined protagonist who comes of age and locates herself within

society over the course of the novel. Also, unlike the central characters of *The Lowland,* *Homegoing,* and *Hope…*, the protagonist of *Skyline* is a white subject in a nation formed through settler colonialism and therefore would traditionally fit the Esty model of colonial subjectivity. However, within the postcolonial post-apartheid context of *Skyline*, the conventions of the *Bildungsroman* are subtly subverted; the narrator does not enter into a society of fellow citizens, but into a community of marginalized non-citizens whose rights are always in question.

In a genre inextricably linked to nationality and citizenship, the protagonist of *Skyline* spends the course of the novel building community and solidarity with non-citizens against the backdrop of post-apartheid South Africa, where territorial colonialism has only recently been supplanted by economic globalization. As Ogaga Okuyade observes in "Traversing Geography, Obtaining Cognition" (2017), the *Bildungsroman* genre has always been adapted by authors on the African continent to depict the difficulty of becoming a self-actualized citizen in a deeply impoverished postcolonial space:

> A re-examination of the dialectic of the individual and the nation in Africa reinforces the fact that African coming-of-age narratives do not emphasize reintegration and harmonious reconciliation of the protagonist with his/her society as the prototypical Western bildungsroman does. Instead, it expresses a variety of forces that inhibit or prevent the protagonist from achieving self-realization in postcolonial African spaces… These forces include exile or dislocation, problems of transcultural interaction, poverty, and the difficulties of preserving personal, familial, and cultural memories. (Okuyade 360-361)

What Okuyade here describes is similar to Esty's observation that "the developmental logic of the late bildungsroman underwent substantial revision as the relatively stable temporal frames of national destiny gave way to a more conspicuously global, and therefore more uncertain, frame of social reference" (Esty 6). Postcolonial African nations, whose birth is inextricably linked to the forces of colonization and decolonization, are always already global; the simple self-realization of the citizen-subject is complicated by the dislocation of traditional ethnic identities onto the nation-state, as well as exploitative transcultural interactions and the poverty that it engenders. At *Skyline*'s end, the unnamed narrator is not reconciled with a community of South African citizens, but with the marginalized community of migrants and refugees who inhabit Skyline, and vicariously the broader global community of migrants, refugees, and homeless that have been created through the trauma of colonialism.

It would be a disservice to this community to present it as uncomplicated. Not least of the ruptures produced by a traumatic event is the rupture between subject and witness, and in *Skyline* this rupture is unavoidable; in addition to testimony on her own broken and abusive homelife, our narrator offers secondhand testimony of the Mozambican Civil War and Nazi Germany, transphobia and apartheid. Although the narrator, like the reader, is somewhat removed from these events, through storytelling she is drawn into community with the refugees who populate Skyline, and foreign acts of slaughter and genocide become intimate and personal.

One of the narrator's closest friends is Bernard, a refugee from the Mozambican Civil War who is living in Cape Town illegally, with forged documents. Over multiple chapters of the book, Bernard tells the story of his life in Mozambique and how he was

separated from his wife and children. While Bernard is speaking of events that are removed from the present in space and time, he speaks urgently to the narrator in the second person as though he is giving her advice necessary for her survival, as though these events are happening now. When speaking of his work before the war, he says "*I tell you something—you never to take a cigar from the Senhor. He can beat you for that. So you not walking again when he finish to beat you*" (32).[27] Bernard couches the story of his past as advice for the narrator, who will most likely never encounter Bernard's old Senhor but is invited to imagine herself in Bernard's position. Of the war itself Bernard says:

> *I tell you something about this soldiers… They got in the eyes something*
> *so when they look at you maybe you know you be the dead man soon. It*
> *better you look at the feet than look at the eyes of that soldier. But if you*
> *look at the feet the soldier can shout at you to come here and he can put*
> *his gun inside your mouth and asking you what you hiding inside your*
> *roof… And all these things he asking so you are shaking your whole body*
> *and your teeth hitting against that piece of gun in your mouth… He can*
> *shoot around the feet so you jumping and all the other soldiers they*
> *laughing. Then he can kill you anyway.* (33)

Through use of the second person, Bernard invites the narrator to envision herself interacting with the soldiers, making the difficult decision of where to direct her gaze, and knowing that there is no correct answer, that the soldier may very well "kill her anyway." Details such as "shaking your whole body" and "your teeth hitting against that

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[27] In *Skyline,* voices other than the narrator's are denoted not by quotation marks but by italics.

piece of gun in your mouth" suggest that this scenario is not hypothetical, but something that happened to Bernard, something that he remembers with his entire body. Bernard's delivery combines the intimacy of a first-person account with the general applicability of an instruction manual: this happened to him, but not only to him. It could also happen to the narrator in her relatively safe, stable city.

> *This I telling you about the soldiers, what is all the same about all the soldiers, they all killing you anyway. You give them the corn, you show them where is the water, you try to deciding where the other army is hiding and you tell this soldiers. But they kill you anyway… So what I telling you is this. When you see the soldiers mad from killing coming to your place, you better to hide away. No good try to talk with soldiers.* (33-34)

Bernard evokes the terrifying image of "the soldiers mad from killing coming to *your place*" (emphasis added), a direct threat to the reader. Even the idea that this advice may someday be useful implies that the narrator and the reader are vulnerable to war, that we should know how to act when it comes. The narrator responds appropriately to this warning, realizing that her world in Cape Town is not as safe from war as she believed:

> I feel the hot breath of war puff into my face and make my eyes sting with the ash of burning villages; ash from the burning of thatched roofs; ash from the torched corn stores. War has crept in on its belly through the long grasses of the dry season and crossed the dry riverbeds to come close, close to me here in the city where bush war should not reach. (34)

Bernard's targeted use of the second person, his personal experience translated into universal principles, is a warning to both the narrator and the reader that conflict is not as far away as it might seen, and that, as the narrator realizes, "Non-war is just a butterfly or soft petals. Strong wind or beating sun shrivels it" (34). Through Bernard's powerful testimony, the narrator sees herself as part of the same fragile world as "the numberless refugees marching down like a column of ants to reach Skyline and safety" (35).

Yet *Skyline* is preoccupied with the limitations of spoken testimony, the places where language fails. The narrator finds that after Bernard's verbal testimony, she cannot comfort him with words:

> I touch Bernard's back. I put my hand on his back and run it down his spine. I run my hands down his back and across his shoulders. His eyes are closed and tears are running down his face. I want to say, don't cry, Bernard. Bernard, your children are somewhere, I will help you find them.
>
> But I say nothing. Because I know I can't do anything. (56)

In this passage verbal language fails to provide relief or communicate intimacy, but a sense of community is achieved through physical touch. In a later passage where Bernard is experiencing a flashback, the narrator writes: "Sometimes we help him sell flags. Sometimes when his hands shake we hold them" (69).

> In *HumAnimal: Race, Law, and Language*, Kalpana Seshadri writes:
>
> It has often been observed that dehumanization occurs through the instrumentalization of the sole and sacrosanct dividing line between human and nonhuman—that is, language or, more properly, the logos as meaningful and credible speech. The other is silenced—rendered

speechless as a mute beast undeserving of human sympathy or recognition. (ix)

To reiterate, language, or "the logos as meaningful and credible speech," is widely perceived to be the necessary condition for being human, and therefore having a claim to "human rights." This relationship, which Seshadri calls "the trinity of law, language, and humanness" (x), contributes to the power of first-person *Bildungsroman* narratives like *Skyline*; through demonstrating her mastery of language, the narrator strengthens her claim to human rights.

Simultaneously, *Skyline* asserts the agency and humanity of the narrator's nonverbal sister, Mossie. Through the narrator's voice, we are shown that Mossie's mind holds its own form of knowledge:

> [Mossie's] teachers treat her in a really limited way because she has never shown them any of the amazing things she can do. They see her words get caught up and not form properly and they watch her laugh at the wrong time and think she can't do things with her mind. They don't realize that she plays bridge and poker like an ace and no one can beat her. And she loves patterns and symmetry. (61)

Mossie is a nonverbal character in a genre that is composed of, and necessarily privileges, language, yet both the narrator (who aspires to be a writer) and the text itself demand that we view Mossie as fully intelligent and fully human. Mossie's way of knowing does not rely on names or language, but is nevertheless defended as valid by both the narrator and the narrative itself. Mossie is repeatedly shown to be intuitive and knowledgeable. As the narrator tells us, Mossie knows all of the hundreds of birds that she feeds: "the way she

knows when a bead is missing she also knows when a bird is missing. They haven't got names or anything, they just make a pattern in her mind, so when one's missing, it's obvious to her" (67-68). The patterns in Mossie's mind poses a challenge to the established view that without language, thought is a vague uncharted nebula; through patterns, Mossie has discovered an alternative way of knowing.

While Mossie is alienated by a school system that doesn't care to try to understand her, she has no trouble communicating with her sister and with close friends. For instance, after Mossie discovers her love for beads, she is thrown out a bead shop and becomes horribly depressed, refusing to leave her bed. When the narrator returns from purchasing beads, Mossie is "sitting on the edge of the bed, all dressed and ready to go," prompting the narrator to ask "How'd you know where I went, you rubbish?" (64). Mossie's inability to communicate through language does not impede her ability to understand those close to her, as her sister recognizes: "Mossie understands everything when she wants to" (65). During one of the narrator's panic attacks, the she crawls into Mossie's bed for comfort, and like the narrator with Bernard, Mossie finds a way to comfort her beyond and without words: "Mossie pours beads over me. Words are tangled up in her throat, they won't untwine, they won't undo, they stay tied up: *I hold you, I hold you.* She squeezes my face in her hands, forces my eyes open with her fingers to look at her: *I am here! I am here!*" (135).

South African institutions have failed the narrator and her sister, as has language itself; subsequently, the project of *Bildungsroman* must fail. The narrator and her sister will not enter into community with other South African citizens; Mossie's neurodivergence precludes her from sharing their language or their rights. For support,

the narrator and Mossie turn to the subaltern and undocumented community that populates Skyline. We see this community in action when Mossie receives a letter requesting a home visit from a social worker. Mossie's neurodivergence and mood swings are disruptive at school, and the social worker proposes that Mossie should be institutionalized and medicated. In this chapter, assimilation into society is the enemy that the community must work together to defeat. The narrator and Mossie bring the social worker's letter to Alice and Bluebell, two transgender sex workers who have taken on a maternal role for the girls, often watching Mossie during the day. Alice and Bluebell tell the narrator to bring Mossie to them every day before school "to have her hair brushed and her uniform checked" (117) and they arrange for a home visit at the house of the narrator's wealthy schoolfriend Raphael while his mother is out of town.

On the day of the home visit, Alice and Bluebell arrange the two girls in Rafael's lavish home as if for a performance:

I sit in a deep armchair with a copy of *David Copperfield* at my side. Mossie sits in an armchair with a teddy and a doll. She has been scrubbed and dressed up in a pink dress and looks a bit pale. Our Aunt Alice sits on the red leather sofa sipping mineral water, dressed in a steel-grey Jenny Button trouser suit with a single strand of pearls around her neck. Her hair is brushed back sleekly, her make-up is light and she has tiny pearl studs in her ears. She looks lovely and rich and smells of Coco Chanel. (118)

For the reader who has spent many pages with these characters, this scene is an obvious charade. All three characters are in costume, with Alice's trendy clothes and heavy makeup toned down significantly; Mossie has never expressed interest in teddies or dolls,

and is clearly terrified. Bluebell remains off-stage, helping Rafael's family's cook in the kitchen. The narrator does not explain why, but we can suppose that some aspect of Bluebell's appearance would be unacceptable to the social worker; it is likely that she does not "pass" as well as Alice. Bernard is enlisted to play the role of waiter, and "keeps his eyes down as good servants should" (120). Through a communal effort, the social worker is convinced that Mossie and the narrator are now living with their wealthy aunt and she is sent on her way with an agreement not to medicate Mossie for the time being. The subaltern residents of Skyline have triumphed over the apparatus of the state, and the community has successfully protected a vulnerable member.

This community is not limited to the members of the lunch party: it also includes Mrs. Rowinsky, who sheltered Jews in Germany during World War II; Princess, who is from Rwanda and shelters refugees in her apartment; and Gracie and Cliff, a married blind couple who had to hide their relationship during Apartheid because Cliff is white and Gracie is coloured. It is a community which troubles boundaries between those with voices and those without, those who have a "right" to citizenship and those who do not.

The narrator uses her ability to write to advocate for those who communicate in other ways. Take, for instance, the description of Mossie buying Xhosa beads from dagga (marijuana) dealers from the Transkei, a formerly independent state which was incorporated into South Africa in 1994. Bernard and the narrator leave Mossie to her own devices as she haggles for glass beads from "rural people who don't speak much English but manage to communicate quite well" (137). Mossie is learning to speak the language of Xhosa beads from the dagga traders: "Beads, when woven together in different colour combinations, speak a language of their own" (137). Mossie is "frantic to buy up this

147

silent speech" (137), similar to her own silent language. The narrator translates this speech for us:

> *I am an old woman. I was once the best dancer but now my feet are*
> *tired. I am content to watch.*
>
> *I am a Qaba maiden. I am not yet betrothed.*
>
> *I am returned from working on the mines and my beloved awaits*
> *me. She has threaded this girdle for my homecoming.* (138)

Through translating this dying art form into language the narrator both memorializes it through the prestigious form of the *Bildungsroman* and argues that the beadwork, like Mossie, has intrinsic value, that while it is not a formal language it is nevertheless a legitimate form of communication worthy of consideration and protection.

The narrator also translates Bernard's paintings, one of which is lovingly described at the end of each chapter. In another instance of intra-Skyline solidarity, Bernard learns to paint from Mrs. Rowinsky. Each of Bernard's paintings evokes a well-known art piece while incorporating elements of his life in the margins of Cape Town. Below I include a description of one piece in its entirety, a portrait of the Rwandan refugee Princess, to demonstrate how the narrator highlights both classical allusions and elements of Cape Town life:

> In this, the third picture, *It Is the Woman of Rwanda*, a fat black
> woman sits on a wooden crate. Her legs are spread slightly apart, so her
> long and voluminous robe drapes down between her thighs.
>
> She holds an open Chinese fan.

On her face are small ritual scars, cut into her cheeks when she was a child. Her face is black-black. Her lips and the inside of her mouth are a luminous and erotic red.

The frenzied colours of her robe leap out from the canvas in their richness: mulberry-purple, burnt-ochre, paw-paw-orange and sacrificial-crimson.

We are reminded, though not by the woman's posture, nor by her race, of *Woman of Algiers* by Auguste Renoir. It is the facial expression, the look captured by the rich mouth, the profusion of colours which convey this similarity.

The frame of this picture is made from slightly rusted, flattened-out Coca-Cola cans which detract somewhat from the timelessness of the woman's face. (11)

The narrator compares *It Is the Woman of Rwanda* to Auguste Renoir's 1870 portrait *Odalisque (An Algerian Woman)*, reproduced below:

Painting by Auguste Renoir

The *Odalisque* is believed to be an homage to Delacroix's nude of the same name, and while the model in Renoir's *Odalisque* is clothed, she conveys the sensuality of a nude through her expression, which Zimmerman describes as one of "drowsy and melancholic voluptuousness" (22). The narrator juxtaposes the comparison to the *Odalisque*, a well-known painting by a highly-regarded French impressionist, to Bernard's use of Coca-Cola cans, gesturing towards global capitalism and cheap consumer goods. Meanwhile, Renoir's white model surrounded by luxurious Orient-inspired fabrics and props has been transformed into a fat black Rwandan woman sitting on a crate; any feeling of luxury in Bernard's painting stems from the richness of the fabric of the model's robes, and is offset by the ordinariness of the crate. The model alludes to the orientalism of the original painting through the Chinese fan she holds even as her "small ritual scars" speak of her childhood in Rwanda. Bernard's painting is a mélange of global influences, and reflects the globalization of the Cape Town apartment complex where he and the narrator live.

As readers, we never view this portrait, nor any of the others under discussion, directly. We only experience them through the narrator's descriptions. Nevertheless, their inclusion within the story is as much an aspect of Bernard's "voice" in the narrative as his verbal testimony, reminiscent of Bakhtin's idea of the the hybrid utterance: "an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two 'languages,' two semantic and axiological belief systems" (Bakhtin 305). Although the entire novel is communicated through the voice of the narrator, through the inclusion of the portraits we encounter the residents of *Skyline* as Bernard perceives them: Princess, whom the narrator describes as a "big, strong person, always sweating" (9), becomes an object of erotic desire.

Skyline alludes to, and even utilizes, traditional formal methods for conceiving of citizenship and nationality, including elements of the *Bildungsroman*: a youthful narrator who learns about her place in her community, with language (via the narrator's voice) as an instrument of the reconciliation between self and society. Yet even as the narrator draws on these forms, they are subverted, thwarting the traditional trajectory of a *Bildungsroman*. To once again borrow a phrase from Esty, we do not witness adulthood arrive "to fold youth's dynamism into a conceit of uneventful middle age" (18); at novel's end, the narrator is young and full of potential, very possibly about to begin writing the text the reader has just completed. Nor is the narrator integrated into South African society and citizenship; she has received neither education nor professional status, with school appearing in the text as a hindrance to other, more important pursuits.

However, the narrator does express her relationship to language, as well as to community, in a way which does not so much ape the *Bildungsroman* form as rhyme with it:

> Bernard! I can weave from my words histories and songs of love, rhyming sculptures and pictures of every sort! They fly in the wind for you! Do you see them? Not concrete, not traffic fumes! They are no longer vagrant and wandering words. They are tales, Bernard, tellings which the wind will always carry for you! (170)

The adulthood that is achieved in *Skyline* is not the adulthood of a citizen; on the contrary, it is a sort of "moral adulthood" that undermines the hegemony of a nation-state. The narrator comes into her own as a moral agent through the testimony of others, all of whom have been failed by the nation-state. Bernard loses his family through the ultimate failure of the nation-state: a Civil War. The scene of Bernard's murder is interspersed with echoes of the Civil War he survived:

> They pin him to the wall. He hears the crackling of boots against the dry scrub and bushes. He hears the smothered cries of mothers running. He hears the shouts of soldiers behind him. Three armies circle him and he begins to sweat the cold waters which the closeness of death brings. (165)

Not only does description place the reality of Bernard's trauma front and center, recognizing that memories of the Civil War in Mozambique color his experience of violence; it also recognizes that this small-scale act of violence is, in some ways, a Civil War on a microscopic level. Bernard's murderer, Giovanni, makes no secret of racism's role in the assault: *"Black bastardo, you want looka my wife again? I show you my wife, you black merda!"* (166). Bernard's race, ethnicity, and status as non-citizen make him a

152

target for violence. No one calls the authorities. The crime scene is not discovered by the state; the crime is witnessed by homeless methamphetamine addicts, then the scene is independently discovered by Princess from Rwanda, who "knew better than anyone how to carry the war dead" (167) due to her experience of the Rwandan genocide. Bernard's murder is a blatant example of the failure of state institutions within *Skyline*, and solidarity between those the state has forgotten or deliberately excluded.

The narrator's determination to harness the power of language in Bernard's name is a kind of adulthood, but it exists outside of the state, almost in outright defiance of it, and so does not fulfill the promise of the *Bildungsroman* genre. *Skyline* is an illustration of the *Bildungsroman* genre's insufficiencies for colonial and postcolonial contexts and subjects: the nation-state and language both appear as powerful entities, but their hegemony is not complete. The nation-state fails to maintain its borders, as well as the violence within them. The narrator's language cannot resurrect Bernard once he is dead: as she screams for Bernard, Princess tells her, "*We cannot call [the dead] back from where they are*" (168). The novel closes with a description of the final piece in Bernard's collection, "*It is the Portrait of the Artist with his Good Friends.*" As with all of Bernard's paintings, we experience the image imperfectly. Language cannot provide us with the image itself; only a description of it.

The *Bildungsroman* promises the demonstration of universal truths, not the least of which is the exercise of human rights through participation in society as a citizen. Nevertheless, critical examinations of the genre stress its origin and development in 18th- and 19th-century Europe and how it formed in conversation with other young concepts: nationalism and the nation-state, the individuated subject-citizen, and capitalism. As Jed

Esty's argument demonstrates, when the *Bildungsroman* is removed from this context it can alter in ways which reflect its new societal and cultural context, even to the point where it is no longer a *Bildungsroman* at all.

In this dissertation, I have examined four postcolonial novels that challenge the *Bildungsroman* in innovative ways. The first three of these novels—*The Lowland*, *Homegoing*, and *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*—explored the lives of characters of color living in globalized postcolonial settings incredibly different from the 19th-century European context that birthed the *Bildungsroman*. While *Skyline* also takes place in a globalized postcolonial setting, the white protagonist living in a settler colonial nation is more reminiscent of a postcolonial Kim than any of the characters in the previous three protagonist-less novels.

As a coming-of-age novel centered on a single protagonist who never actually comes of age, *Skyline* echoes the modernist colonial novels examined by Esty. Yet it also sharply diverges from these novels through its context. *Skyline* takes place in South Africa not long after the end of apartheid; the old state has been declared morally bankrupt on a global stage and lost all authority, and the validity, longevity, and moral authority of the new state are all deeply in question. The state is either an instrument of active oppression, as when the social worker threatens to rehome Mossie, or neglect, as when it turns a blind eye to the murder of Bernard and the poverty of the residents of Skyline. Under Esty's model, the arrested development of the protagonist "literalizes the problem of colonialism as failed or postponed modernization" (Esty 14); in *Skyline*, the failed entity is not the colonial project but rather the national project, the idea of a nation-state with national borders and internal consistency. In the post-apartheid setting, the

increased slipperiness of racial and national categories makes possible the creation of a society that exists outside of the state's control, a society of non-citizens who have no claim to the state's protection.

      Skyline rejects the *Bildungsroman*'s promise that subject-citizens will attain human rights throughout the course of the narrative within the context of the state. Through the repeated failure of institutions—language, the state, the school system, the national border—the residents of *Skyline* build an alternative community which eschews national borders while decentering the individual citizen through testimony.

5.0   POSTSCRIPT: DISPATCHES FROM CAPE TOWN

Prelude:

The following are dispatches from the Open Book Festival, which I attended in September 2017 at the opening stages of writing my dissertation. I am concluding my dissertation in June of 2019, two years after the early bellwethers of a rising tide of nationalism and global anti-immigrant sentiment which inspired this project: the twin electoral victories of Donald Trump and Brexit. I have written this dissertation in an ever-shifting political climate, and often felt the ground moving under me, as when I wrote my third chapter on borders and transnational migration in *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* while watching a humanitarian crisis unfold on my nation's southern border. Likewise, I've watched as the decades-long norms for treatment of asylum-seekers that have been in place since the end of World War II began to slowly crumble on a global scale. One notable example is the Trump administration's recent policy of violating national and international law by forcing asylum seekers to wait in Mexico as their case for asylum is heard (Villegas and Semple). While this decision will face challenges in the courts, the fact that it is considered politically feasible is an indication of a shift in the electorate and, I fear, an augury of what is to come.

In a column for the *New York Times* entitled "Trump Wants to Make It Hard to Get Asylum. Other Countries Feel the Same" (November 2018), Max Fisher and Amanda Taub track the enforcement of asylum law from the end of World War II to the present. They observe that "what we have now isn't a global refugee system so much as a loose

network of occasionally and partially observed norms" and worriedly conclude, "If asylum rights were declining even in the era of sunny 1990s global liberalism, it is hard to imagine their doing much better in the era of Donald J. Trump, Viktor Orban and Vladimir V. Putin" (Fisher and Taub).

Even as wealthy nations militaristically fortify their borders, there is a continuing and expanding movement that questions the very practice of national borders. In the foreword to Harsha Walia's *Undoing Border Imperialism*, Andrea Smith writes: "let us consider the term *immigrant.* This term presumes that people must naturally be bound to one place, and if they travel, then they are where they do not belong" (Smith). Not only is the concept of immigration dependent upon the historically-contingent idea of a nation-state (as demonstrated by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*), but it is not even necessary to the conceptualization of a nation-state that migration be legally regulated at all.

Nevertheless, it is increasingly the case that nations with strong economies compared to the rest of their region are aggressively cracking down on immigration, and South Africa is no exception. In July of 2017, the Task Team on International Migration in South Africa's Department of Home Affairs released a white paper recommending changes in immigration policy including the delinking of citizenship from permanent residence and the creation of a new points-based work permit system. In this *White Paper on International Migration for South Africa*, the South African government worries that the asylum system is being abused by the undeserving: "The asylum seeker regime is being abused by economic migrants resulting in over 90 per cent of the claims for asylum being rejected. As the biggest economy in the southern African region and the African

continent, South Africa is attracting a high number of economic migrants that use the asylum seeker regime as an entry point" (*White Paper* 59). However, the dividing line between an economic migrant and someone with a "legitimate" claim to asylum is murky, and becomes even moreso when we consider climate change as a driving force of human migration.

In a world increasingly defined by climate change, subsistence farmers and others who depend on agriculture are often displaced by extreme or unusual weather patterns, a trend which is expected to increase exponentially as the effects of climate change become more severe. As Todd Miller writes in *Storming the Wall: Climate Change, Migration, and Homeland Security*:

> An average of 21.5 million people were displaced every year between 2008 and 2015 from the "impact and threat of climate-related hazards." In the same time span, 26.4 million people are estimated to have been displaced each year by disasters more generally. This number means that one person is forced from their home every second, and according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, a person is more likely to be displaced by environmental forces by war. (Miller)

As Miller observes, climate change is the major driving force behind human migration; however, despite this generally available knowledge, "there is no legal framework for climate refugees. Not in international law, not in the laws of specific countries. Instead, there is more spending on border reinforcement than ever before in the history of humankind" (Miller). There is no way to fairly evaluate claims for asylum without taking climate change into account, and there is no process for granting asylum that recognizes

the extent to which climate change is a factor. Barring a change in the way asylum is internationally regarded, we can expect national criteria for granting asylum to become increasingly outdated, inscrutable, and inequitable as climate change becomes more severe.

The dispatches below were written in the midst of an event self-consciously designed to be both cosmopolitan and broadly accessible, yet in the two minor confrontations I outline, we clearly see the friction between those with privilege and those without, a friction that I theorize will only become more pronounced with time as climate change contributes to skyrocketing wealth inequality and global migration.

First Dispatch:

"I don't believe that a queer space should be a safe space. If it's so safe, it gives people the license to be complacent." The sentiment is familiar to me: I think I've heard every possible permutation of the argument against "safe spaces," both on the activist circuit and in toxic comment sections that accuse my generation of being sensitive snowflakes.

The context, however, is new. David is a Nigerian lawyer, author, and human rights activist. He is pursuing a doctoral degree at the Centre for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria. He is also homosexual, and if he were to return to Nigeria he would risk imprisonment for up to 14 years.

This is Queering Spaces, a panel about "identifying and activating queer spaces in Africa" at the Open Book Festival in Cape Town, South Africa. I've traveled across the Atlantic Ocean, the equator, and three continents to conduct field research for my

dissertation on the theme of the global novel at a Festival that feels both familiar (cosmopolitan, academic) and vertiginously foreign.

Makhosazana Xaba is our moderator. She works with GALA, Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (originally named The Gay and Lesbian Archives), an organization dedicated to preserving and disseminating knowledge about LGBTQ+ people. GALA was established in 1997, shortly after South Africa became the first nation in the world to constitutionally disallow discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in 1996.

Makhosazana and one of the panelists, Nombulelo Madonko, co-facilitated a creative writing workshop for LGBT+ youth in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. Nombulelo works at the Sexual Rights Centre in Bulawayo, where she says the door is always locked for security reasons—LGBT+ resource centers are a target for hate crimes. She calls it "an extension of a closet," where most of the clients are helped in secret.

The Q&A session consists of wireless microphone being passed around by the audience and several microphone-runners. The first audience member to grab hold of the mic is a tall, black boy with short hair; he relinquishes it after Makhosazana points out that she was not calling on him, but someone behind him. An audience member asks about how Nigerians find queer community. David responds that in Nigeria midnight phone calls, from 12:30-4:30, are usually free of charge. "It is like our version of grindr," he says, laughing.

The microphone is passed back to the tall boy. He looks at David, and says "I am talking to you." He says, "Things in Nigeria are getting worse. Five years ago, it was better. People are afraid to hold hands in the street. This year forty people have been arrested. So my question is what are you doing." It's an accusation, not a question.

"People are hurting every day. You're in Cape Town. What are you doing, man? You need to help."

David's face shows nothing. The boy passes the microphone forwards, and more questions follow, but I'm watching David, trying to imagine what it's like to sit onstage in this warm, supportive room and be hit with a hostile question from someone who looks a lot like him.

The moderator calls on David to respond.

"Okay," he says. "What am I doing? I'm a lawyer. I'm a student. I'm a writer. Currently I'm living in South Africa. I just have two hands." He raises his hands in the air; the audience claps supportively, and some people cheer. It's a good answer, but in the gesture of holding up two hands there's a note of surrender. In this room he has the upper hand, but privately I wonder if he's made peace with himself, or if the question will haunt him.

"We allow ourselves to be targets as much as we can take," he says.

As I filter out, I see the tall black boy in front of me. He's wearing a black leather jacket and skinny jeans. His arm is around an older man. He's leaning in with an intense expression on his face, talking, and he continues until a shift in the crowd cuts him off from my view. I can't hear what he's saying but I think I can guess. It was a good answer, but not good enough for him.

Second Dispatch:

In 2008, a series of xenophobic riots in multiple South African cities led to 62 deaths. The xenophobic ire was directed against immigrants from other, poorer African

nations, primarily Mozambique, Malawi, and Zimbabwe; however, 21 of those killed in the riots were South African citizens.

In 2009, only one year after the riots, a Zimbabwean man named Oswald Kucherera was forced to migrate to South Africa. The economy of Zimbabwe had all but collapsed, particularly in the wake of the disastrous and destabilizing reelection campaign of its corrupt president Robert Mugabe.

Oswald, who goes by Ozzy, is sitting in front of me now. Once again, the context is familiar: the panel, Response to Arrival, is on the subject of migration.. Although I've never spoken with an undocumented migrant from Zimbabwe, Ozzy's story is all too familiar. He did not want to leave Zimbabwe, and he did not want to travel to South Africa in the wake of the riots. But he felt that he had no choice.

"I don't think I'll ever feel at home," Ozzy tells the moderator of the panel. Partly, he stresses, this is because he feels that he could always be chased out again. There's no guarantee, from year to year, that the South African government will let him stay, or that popular opinion will not lead to a crackdown on migrants.

Karina Szczurek is a very different sort of migrant. When Karina was ten, she and her parents migrated from Poland, sought asylum in Italy, and crossed into Austria without documents. They eventually received asylum in Austria. As an adult, Karina has enthusiastically adopted Cape Town as her new home. She describes herself as "Polish by birth, Austrian by solicitation, South African by heart."

Karina was in Cape Town during the 2008 riots, but was something of a protected class; none of the xenophobes were on the lookout for migrants from Poland or Austria. Nevertheless, she says she was uncomfortably reminded of her time as an asylum-seeker

in Austria, unable to speak without an accent: "My color protects me, but I remember what it is to be betrayed when you open your mouth."

Unlike Ozzy, Karina has wholeheartedly adopted her new homeland on the grounds that it's as culturally confused as she is. "I always felt that there was something about being in a multi-cultural society that is very different from being in a monocultural society like Austria or Poland… I felt like I didn't have to explain myself anymore. I hope that South Africa will never want me gone."

Karina says it took ten years to get her South African ID. "For the first time in my life, I'm legal all over the place," she enthuses.

"Cool," Ozzy says. He is not smiling.

The third panelist, Elina Hirvoven, is not herself a migrant; she is here because she directed a documentary about the refugee crisis in Finland. A woman from the audience begins with an anecdote that a Finnish person told her about the ideology of nude beaches: "In Finland we are an egalitarian country. We believe that people, all people, are equal. And we have an easy way to prove this. We get naked." But then, the woman continues, she learned that the Finns supported the Nazis during World War II. So is Finland an innately egalitarian country that imported xenophobia from elsewhere? she asks Elina. What is the truth?

I find the idea of imported xenophobia to be charmingly contradictory, but Elina takes in stride the suggestion that the Finnish people may have transcended racial bias, only to be corrupted by non-Finnish racists. "That's a very good question," she says, and gives a brief history of fascism in Finland. "I don't think there's any country in the world that's completely free of xenophobia, to be honest."

Now that we've established the innate racial biases of the Finns, Karina asks Ozzy if he would ever return to Zimbabwe "if the situation [there] settled down." Ozzy answers without hesitation. "Yes. Yes, I would definitely go back."

An audience member from Zimbabwe asks if Ozzy thinks he will return to the same Zimbabwe that he has left, or if after years of absence he will feel alienated from that land as well. She says: "You're not home enough to be home here, but you also might not be home enough there to be home either." My field, postcolonial studies, has a by-the-book answer for this. Postcolonial powerhouse Salman Rushdie's essay "Imaginary Homelands" is all about his realization that the India he left behind, the India in his memory, no longer exists.

But Ozzy must not agree with that essay, because he says, confidently: "I don't think it will be that much different. I will definitely move back home to Zimbabwe when things are better."

The woman in the audience is also a migrant, and she speaks in the voice of books I've read, but I find myself wanting to shield Ozzy from her question. I hope that his return to Zimbabwe is simple and joyful and devoid of academic complications. I hope that he continues to belong to his home, and that he never succumbs to becoming the migrant of Salman Rushdie's imagination.

Third Dispatch:

I am all too aware of the arguments against the multicultural globalists in the ivory tower. We are aligned with "the elites," a category that means, simultaneously, big government (when we are leftists) and big business (when we are multicultural liberals).

From an ideological perspective, it's nonsensical to accuse the academy of being communists who are supporting multinational corporations. But there is some truth to the idea that open borders are advantageous to billionaire businessmen in search of the cheapest possible labor and the lowest possible tax rate.

It's also true that there's something very middle-class about books. This is in spite of the fact that books are cheaper and more plentiful than they've ever been in history, and the global literacy rate is higher than ever before. Unfortunately, none of this has changed that fact the majority of writers are from affluent backgrounds. What writing requires, more than anything else, is time, and in the year 2017, time is a luxury that only the wealthy can afford.

I am far from the first to point this out. Lorraine Berry's Lit Hub essay (Berry) is one in a long line of meditations upon writing's hidden expenses. Paradoxically, the fact that writers are not paid very much has made writers on the whole more wealthy, as only those with other streams of income (wealthy parents, a cushy second career) have the resources to pursue writing. Exceptions exist—including, famously, J.K. Rowling—but not in quantities that challenge the rule.

The academic side of literature is no better off. As a graduate student at Boston College, I have a comparatively enviable stipend, and it is still barely enough to cover the cost of living in Boston. Most of my peers either have a second stream of income (such as a spouse) or live in glorified closets with at least two roommates. Like many younger graduate students, I receive assistance from my parents with rent and other essentials; if I did not, I would have less time to devote to my research and would disadvantage myself

competitively. Again, this state of affairs makes the study of literature less accessible to people from lower-income backgrounds.

Books are cheaper than ever, yet they are still classed by virtue of time: time to write, time to study, time to read, with little expectation of financial reward attached.

Inequality is a global hot topic right now, and in South Africa moreso: according to the World Bank and *The Guardian*'s Inequality Project, South Africa was the world's most unequal country in 2016 (as measured by the widely-respected GINI index). Hennie van Vurren, author of *Blood, Money, and Apartheid*, notes in one panel that in South Africa "two families… own as much wealth as 50% of our people."

The space of the Open Book Festival, like many universities and bookshops, is a classed space. In a city whose streets are troubled by rampant poverty, hunger, crime, and homelessness, the Fugard Theater feels like a middle-class enclave. In a nation with an unemployment rate of 26.6%, most of the people here have jobs; in a nation where college is a luxury, most people here have some sort of degree.

This is in spite of the fact that the Open Book Festival was created to increase accessibility to these sorts of events. Like many currencies from the developing world, the rand is weak to the dollar and the euro. For most South Africans, international travel to other nations in Africa is difficult; traveling to the wealthy nations where most literary festivals take place is nearly impossible.

I sat down with Frankie Murrey, the festival coordinator, who told me about the great lengths the Festival goes to to "have an audience that feels like cape town, that feels diverse in the way that Cape Town is diverse." Almost every aspect of the Festival's design is intended to increase accessibility; the location, in the city center, is easily

accessible via public transit, because "even something that's two hours away can be very tricky for a lot of people." There are several free events, and before the festival Frankie contacts a wide network of schools, libraries, and organizations to provide complimentary tickets and transportation to people who might not otherwise be able to attend.

Transportation is only one of the hurdles Frankie faces when trying to bring in South Africans with limited exposure to the literary community. "A lot of people feel defensive when faced with books because their initial interactions haven't been positive ones," she tells me. For this reason, the Open Book Festival includes an array of more accessible genres in its roster: there's a series of oral poetry events, and exhibits and panels focused on zines and comic books. Zines, small-circulation self-published magazines, are relatively easy to produce, while comic books are comprehensible to people whose reading skills are below average.

My final question for Frankie is existential: what is the benefit of bringing people into a literary festival at all? Historically, literature has been a pursuit of the wealthy. More recently, the meteoric rise of STEM and computer science has dragged the humanities into an existential crossroads where they are continually forced to prove their utility. What, then, is the benefit of increasing accessibility for a dying discipline?

"I think that reading generally just builds empathy," Frankie says. "Once you've adopted another person's point of view, you can't pretend it never happened." Reading is also a time to work through a complicated problem. "Reading is a solitary pursuit. So you're in a safe space to start exploring something quite tricky sometimes."

While other forms of media, like television, can be enjoyed in a group, books ask their reader to confront a situation alone. Only later do we meet with other readers and conjure communal meaning out of a solitary experience. The process of turning a solipsistic experience into a shared memory is also uniquely valuable. As Frankie says, "It's not just books that are important… it's also the conversations around books."

Fourth Dispatch:

"We just want to know what happened." Sylvia Vollenhoven, award-winning South African director, speaks in the voice of the nation post-apartheid. "The most frequent plea was for people to say 'tell us what happened.'"

Like any oppressive regime, the apartheid government was secretive. Unlike many oppressive regimes, however, they were not ousted by a revolutionary movement that demanded payment for their crimes in blood. To ensure a peaceful transition of power, Nelson Mandela's government made an odd bargain: they would pursue truth, but not vengeance.

As a result, however, much remains unknown. Regime collaborators have gone unvilified and unpunished, and inaccessible government archives are densely populated by unexamined secrets.

Onstage, there are varying opinions about how to proceed. Karabo Rajuili is the advocacy coordinator at the amaBhungane Centre for Investigative Journalism. Her organization views access to information as a fundamental right, and Karabo's job is to advocate on behalf of journalists using South Africa's Promotion of Access to Information Act. She is, unsurprisingly, in favor of the archives being open and

169

accessible. "Secrecy allows for abuses of human rights… How we got here was having a state which was beholden to secrecy."

Chandré Gould, author of *The Dis-eases of Secrecy: Tracing History, Memory, and Justice,* has a position that is more nuanced (although not necessarily more correct): "There are probably necessary secrets, legitimate secrets, and then other kinds of secrets that are protecting people from accountability for their actions." While Chandré never defines what might make a post-Apartheid secret "necessary," I gather that her reluctance to reveal all is rooted in empathy for the ordinary people that Apartheid made into monsters: "Those are the stories that are not often told, about ordinary human beings, the kinds of things we did under an authoritarian regime." For me, this observation unlocks a sea of ethical questions: is everyone who would have collaborated with Apartheid a monster, even though the opportunity never arises? In which case, latent monstrosity lurks in many ordinary people who have never been offered that sort of bargain. It may live in me.

Fortunately, Hennie van Vuuren offers a comforting synthesis. He advocates for shifting the blame away from individuals and towards the corporations and foreign governments that laundered money and traded weapons with the Apartheid regime. Although most governments and corporations participated in the Apartheid boycott on paper, in practice Hennie and his organization, Open Secrets, have found archival evidence of widespread covert commerce with Apartheid South Africa, with major players including the United States of America and many of its banks. Hennie advocates for forcing the private sector to own up to its Apartheid era crimes. As I learn, in '93-'94 many private-sector documents were burned, and when Hennie and his organization

attempted to request documents from international corporations, "we found this reluctance from the private sector…They wouldn't give us access to the annual reports and then the more we dug, the more we realized that they were missing from other archives." Hennie exposes this massive corporate cover up in his book *Apartheid, Guns and Money: A Tale of Profit*, which argues that Apartheid was economically motivated. The Apartheid regime did a fantastic job of concentrating enormous wealth within a very small sliver of the South African population, to such an extent that their work has proven difficult to undo.

This interpretation of Apartheid secrecy strikes me as both comforting and true. If my work as a postcolonialist has taught me anything, it is that the United States has played a role in almost every major global event post-WWII, and an honest examination of its impact usually reveals some unflattering truths. In this case, according to Hennie's exhaustively researched book, the United States' government condemned Apartheid while its businesses used clever work-arounds to profit from trade with the regime.

Postscript:

In the world as it is, and not as we wish it to be, transnational community often brings asymmetries: between citizen and non-citizen; privileged and non-privileged, wealthy and impoverished. These differences exist within individual nations as well, as South Africans can attest; the World Bank calls South Africa a dual economy and notes that as of 2016 the GINI index, a metric measuring financial inequality within the country, reached an alarming .69 based on income data (World Bank). Yet on a global playing field, with economic migrants moving from less developed to more developed

171

countries, these wealth asymmetries become even more stark. The categories of citizen and non-citizen, those who live in nations with protections for lgbt+ communities and those who do not, also play a role; a global community entails global awareness of inequity, as those lacking privileges are exposed to cultures where those privileges are abundant.

The Open Book Festival is a place where these tensions can reverberate; a cosmopolitan, consciously multicultural space where one can voice one's concerns in relative freedom—provided one can pay the cost of admission, and provided one doesn't mind offending the audience's overwhelmingly middle-class sensibilities. The exchanges recorded in these dispatches reveal the inevitable tensions of diverse global citizens coming together in a moderated cosmopolitan space; they demonstrate both the rewards and the hazards of transnational community.

Parvati Nair wrote in 2004: "The growing transnational mobility of people and capital, the heterogeneity of cultural values and practices, the hybrid products of encounters between formerly unified categories leads to the erosion of the boundaries of the nation-state and to multi-layered allegiances to diverse collective identities" (15-16). The Open Book Festival, as a transnational space in a cosmopolitan city, is an example of a community without propinquity, a group brought together through affiliation rather than through habitual proximity. Yet throughout the Open Book Festival, national boundaries and citizenship continue to rear their heads in both expected and unexpected ways, from the trials of an undocumented citizen living in South Africa to the frankly bizarre mechanics of transnational book distribution.

The role of the nation-state in an economically globalized world is yet to be fully determined, and may well be the defining problem of this century, along with its affiliates: the role of nationalism and the fear of hybridity in its many forms. Through this dissertation I hope to have clarified, or perhaps productively confused, how the complex webs of affiliation in contemporary novels frequently transgress and transcend national borders even as national identity and citizenship continue to define and influence characters. Through the examination of these webs of affiliation, I hope we can create alternative structures of community that are not dependent on national citizenship.

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