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<i>Wanda Balzano and Silvana Carotenuto</i>	1
Views from Elsewhere: <i>Oeuvres</i> of Female Displacement (Editorial)	

Poetics of language

<i>Shahrnush Parsipur</i>	17
Artist's Statement: The Blue Spring of Katmandu (Tehran, 1969)	
<i>Mary Kennan Herbert</i>	23
Artist's Statement: Everything I Needed to Know	
<i>Ada Emërimir</i>	25
Suspended Ethical Space – the Sky? This Mid-air Ek-sistence	
<i>Marta Cariello</i>	27
'Waiting is Forbidden': Exile in Contemporary Palestinian-American Women's Writing and Art	
<i>Makhosazana Xaba</i>	41
Artist's Statement: Poems of Struggle and Exile	

Technologies of Crossing

<i>Shahrnush Parsipur</i>	49
George Orwell and I. An Article (March, 1994)	
<i>Manuela Esposito</i>	53
Tales of Transit: 'Crossing' in Andrea Levy, Roshini Kempadoo and Julie Otsuka	
<i>Gabriela Seccardini</i>	69
'Life with an Adaptor, so We Don't Burn Ourselves'. The Book, Memory, and the Museum in Dubravka Ugrešić's Poetics of Exile	
<i>Annalisa Piccirillo</i>	79
Visions of Performance in Exile: The Book, the Exhibition, and the Digital Archive	
<i>Myriam J. A. Chancy</i>	91
Nomad	
<i>Maija Mäkinen</i>	97
Hiding in Full View: Immigration as Self-Exile	
<i>Marie Anne Zammit</i>	107
Holocaust in My Mind	
<i>Makhosazana Xaba</i>	117
Running	

Collaborations

<i>Jill Hermann-Wilmarth and Teri Holbrook</i> Becoming-Exiles in Shifting Borderlands	127
<i>Laura Fantone</i> Writing Asian Diasporas and Envisioning Shifting Identities in the Art of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Trinh T. Minh-ha	143
<i>Morehshin Allahyari and Jennifer Way</i> Romantic Self-Exiles	157

Exposures

<i>Martyna Bec</i> Babel	171
<i>Kelli Moore</i> <i>Photographie Féminine</i> : Exile and Survival in the Photography of Ana Mendieta, Donna Ferrato, and Nan Goldin	179

Events

<i>Josefina Báez</i> Dominicania	191
<i>Karina A. Bautista</i> Of Identity and Other Mere Feelings: An Interview with Josefina Báez	193
<i>Melissa Ramos</i> Traverse	211
<i>Lynn Book</i> Artist's Statement / Escapes (video installation)	213
<i>Wanda Balzano</i> Introduction to Lynn Book's Video Project Escapes	215

Reviews

<i>Penelope Boyer</i> Myth as Emotional Technology: A Review Essay	219
<i>Monica Calignano</i> "Per un museo postcoloniale" - <i>estetica. studi e ricerche</i> 1 (2012)	229
<i>Michaela Quadraro</i> Sandra Ponzanesi and Marguerite Waller, eds., <i>Postcolonial Cinema Studies</i> (London and New York: Routledge, 2012)	233

Carla Macoggi, *Kkeywa. Storia di una bimba meticcica* (Roma: Sensibili alle Foglie, 2011) and
Carla Macoggi, *La nemesi della rossa* (Roma: Sensibili alle Foglie, 2012)

Views from Elsewhere: *Oeuvres* of Female Displacement Editorial

Exile is an uncomfortable situation, though it is also a magical situation.
(Hélène Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*)

Writing is impossible without some kind of exile.
(Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*)

Female Knowledge on/in Exile

This special issue of *Anglistica AION* is the product of a keen collaboration between two colleagues at two different universities – the University of Naples ‘L’Orientale’ and Wake Forest University, North Carolina – and emerges from a multi-pronged international project that is very much open and in progress. Its genesis can be dated as far back as 2007, when relevant research around exile and migrant women, conducted at ‘L’Orientale’, culminated in a project called “I percorsi dell’esilio: le donne migranti”.¹ As part of a larger cultural festival called “La civiltà delle donne” (4-8 March, 2007), that project consisted of three multi-media laboratories intent on exploring the female experience of exile through the practices of writing, photography and video-art. Silvana Carotenuto, who spearheaded the project, re-proposed its themes in a workshop on “Exile Writing, Arts, and Technologies of Women” at the 17th International Symposium on Electronic Art (ISEA 2011) in Istanbul. The workshop centered around four foci: (1) Reflections on Exile – Woman’s I/Eye in In-Between Spaces; (2) *The Castle of Crossed Destinies* – a laboratory of digital photography on Istanbul; (3) Reading Visions: Women and Survival; and (4) Digital Diaspora/Diasporic Dance. In that context, questions that were explored ranged from the psychoanalytical perspective (*How does exile affect the feminine psyche? What does it produce in terms of dreams, deliriums, nightmares? What links the experience of exile to memory?*) to Derridean concepts of hospitality. In addition to the theoretical debates, there was a practical outcome: the international workshop participants were invited to use their own cameras, iPhones, smartphones, and produce a photo-story after their visits to ‘in-between’ sites of Istanbul (stations, squares, the port, markets) that they identified as places of transit, passage, encounters, in order to trace back their personal experiences – of loss, displacement, non-belonging, postponement – of inhabiting a foreign city.² The emphasis on women’s exile and its expression in art and (through) technology was the driving focus of that workshop and also drives this special issue of *Anglistica AION*.

¹ You can watch the film “I percorsi dell’esilio” (Hermannfilm, 2007) at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=stteSX7w1ys>, 8 July 2013.

² For the outline of the project, go to the Saban University Website: <http://isea2011.sabanciuniv.edu/workshop/exile-writing>, 8 July 2013. For the creative material produced during the ISEA workshop, see the website created for the event: http://www.melissamos.com.au/exile_writing/istanbul_exile_writing.html, 8 July 2013.

In order to accompany the work for the creation of this collection, Wanda Balzano led, together with Lynn Book, a 2012-2013 Humanities Institute faculty seminar at Wake Forest University, which included a heterogeneous group of scholars and practitioners of English, Theater and Dance, Communication, American Ethnic Studies, Romance Languages, Women's and Gender Studies. The seminar was invested in scrutinizing feminist values and fostering scholarship that engages broader and under-recognized themes and works of dissent, creative action and social change from multiple transnational perspectives, with a particular interest in how contemporary discourses of 'migration', 'diaspora', and 'exile' both resist and transform rhetorical and social practices in the US and abroad. Interaction with invited artists such as Myriam Chancy and Josefina Báez added relevance to these investigations. Of course our transatlantic collaboration under the auspices of *Anglistica AION* was implicitly facilitated by modern technology through regular email exchanges as well as VoIP software and streaming media.

The contributions presented here reveal to readers the need to cross-examine the specific knowledge that women produce as they find themselves in the various predicaments of exile, over different times and places, generations and cultures. Their desire to 'think the difference' is matched by an ability to practice the *téchne* of writing, art, and performance. We have therefore divided the issue in two main conceptual frames, each with their respective sections. In "Female Knowledge on/in Exile" we have grouped contributions where language, crossing, and technology are emphasized in order to express women's need and desire to *know* exile – to understand what feelings and experiences are specific to their lives, and how they can think of, share, and bequeath them to others for an easier navigation in their diverse worlds. In their 'passing through', exiled women value the trace of new grounds to explore, but also the re-writing of history (especially if their stories have been marginalized or erased), and the preservation of memory – a place where the same and the other, the living and the leaving can co-exist. While losing their original ground, their identity, and their language, women survive the 'scattering' or diaspora by developing a new understanding of themselves and of others. The final section of this issue, "Diasporas in the Making", makes it clear that one of the conditions of survival for exiles is *transformation*: the extreme displacement instigates a similarly extreme determination to change ways of knowing, through seeing, speaking, and writing. In order to live a new life it is necessary to create new communities, where collaborations are valued as indispensable exchanges. Through such interactions the displacement confronts and 'exposes' both the origin and the lack of it, the grounded and the groundless, the native and the migrant. In the end, to be on new ground means to be able to transform knowledge, to act differently, and invent gestures – 'events' – that are performed in the attempt to make sense of one's encounter with the elsewhere.

The relevant questions that are investigated in this issue of *Anglistica AION* ask: "What links the predicament of exile to creativity? Why do women use the arts as a way to express suffering and mark the geographic, political, and cultural

displacement generated by diasporas? How do digital diasporas represent the female experience of exile?” In essence, such knowledge is not logocentric and realistic but poetic and evocative. Poetry is language pared down to its bare bones and re-elaborated into a skillful *téchne*: in its spontaneous immediacy, it lends itself to a variety of discourses that are left open, and sometimes left unconnected. For this reason, it represents a ductile expression for those who are displaced: poetry is to language what exile is to journey.

Poetics of language – The internationally acclaimed writer and Teheran-born Shahrnush Parsipur opens our collection with a unique piece that is an elegy to living in an elsewhere. She creates a visionary world that is between life and death in order to better navigate her surroundings as an exile: “I am sorry that I can’t go back to my native land. ‘There’ all my books are banned, and ‘here’ nobody reads my books because they are in Persian. I live in a limbo, but I smile, because life is beautiful.”³ Surviving in between (countries, languages, and cultures) is a staple of this kind of living – and knowing. In the subsequent poem by Mary Kennan Herbert, through a distant memory of 1955, a woman remembers her graduation ceremony, which represents an important rite of passage – it is almost like going through a door to find oneself exiled into the future. The uncertainty of what the future might bring is expressed in the tentative question about the possibility of failing or succeeding, in the hope – as futile as a deodorant – that there will be some protection even when, at a later stage, one will be cut off from the past: “Will we fail or succeed, will our deodorant protect us for the next fifty years. Sixty?”⁴ To this poem, another follows, written by Ada Emërimir, an emerging poet who has herself experienced several exiles, traversing the ‘doors’ of Albania, Canada, and Hungary. The crossing of national frontiers often takes place at the airport’s check points, or in the cabin of an airplane. Travelling by and through air gives the sense of a life that is suspended: the breathing becomes more difficult and the bones appear as organic matter on which the dreams of the exiled are sedimented (“Much more otherness sedimented on my bones”⁵).

These are dreams of stasis and of origins (“Kept dreaming about my mom”⁶) that mirror the impossibility of lingering in one place, as Marta Cariello also describes in her analysis of poetry and art by contemporary Palestinian-American women writers and artists. While in certain localities “Waiting is Forbidden”, in the political sense that no loitering or stasis is allowed, but, rather, a compulsion to move is enforced, as in the case of the Palestinians, on the other hand, especially for those women who resist domesticity and the discourses of womanhood in relation to the home/land, movement is impelling and unavoidable. The reckoning that, with one’s home in pieces, moving is necessary causes many women writers and artists to find a way to challenge assumptions about what signifies home and belonging and to resist any fixing of identity by gender, race, or sexuality. In recent years, in Palestinian and Palestinian-American poetry the presence of landscapes intensifies, as if to counterbalance uprootedness and displacement. Hopes and – real and imagined – experiences are distilled in the bodies of those women

³ Shahrnush Parsipur, “Artist’s Statement”, this issue, 17.

⁴ Mary Kennan Herbert, “Everything I Needed to Know”, this issue, 24.

⁵ Ada Emërimir, “This Mid-air Ek-sistence”, this issue, 26.

⁶ Ibid.

who, in order to claim the cogency of their dreams, seek out a mother tongue and transform themselves in the creative urgency to continue to live by experimenting, writing, and articulating themselves in a range of media and artistic expressions.

In the poems of the South African writer Makhosazana Xaba, women run even in their sleep, with their bodies as “comrades in flight”,⁷ ready, with one hand, to cast stones and, with the other, to help those who fall. As if in answer to the newly graduated woman of Herbert’s poem, who was asking, “Will we fail...?”⁸ Xaba admits that failing is an intrinsic part of the condition of those women who are exposed to the nightmares of violence, apartheid, war, diaspora – “I have known corpses... / I have known ashes...”.⁹ Yet, when women manage to get up again, they run as fast as the rhythm of their dreams, and become stronger in their pursuit of freedom. As they cannot rest or forget their goals until social justice is achieved, they keep running: “How can we forget when being on the run has become the natural rhythm of our sleep?”¹⁰ Such predicament produces a different kind of knowledge – one in which the poet herself, renamed “Fish”, learns to immerse herself in, as if in a “river”.¹¹ For us readers, the suggestion is that writers and survivors such as Xaba use their fluid existence to accuse, to reconcile, to rebuild, often through an ethic of care toward those who are in need to be protected: “He doesn’t know that when we send him away to sleep at sunset, / we start another mission of hiding women and children in these graves / so they can at least get some sleep and feed their infants in peace.”¹² These forms of knowledge are troublesome, however, as they echo a question that cannot remain silent: who or what will shield the bodies of the women who run, fight back, and bravely mark the paths of the world? In Xaba’s own words, the question – which remains unanswered – rings with spiritual truth: “Who will wash my feet?”¹³

Technologies of Crossing – The circumstances and styles in which natives devolve into exiles may differ widely, but the dilemmas that all displaced figures confront are often the same. Each loses the ability to live comfortably at home, and must work more industriously than natives to fashion a sense of placement out of forbidding places. For many exiles, the first task is to determine just what kind of exile they have experienced. What brought them to this place? How far have they travelled, geographically and psychologically? Where, exactly, are they? Can they make sense of their surroundings and be true to their roots through the use of technology or does technology, in some cases, augment their distance from their (perhaps rural) home? Some search for role models from whom they might learn answers to these questions, and on whose experiences they can base their own plans for the future. Some others – as Parsipur in “George Orwell and I. An Article” – reflect on the role of freedom and self-determination, debating whether technology is a ‘prosthesis’ that hampers or facilitates knowledge. Not all technology enhances culture in a creative way; technology can also help facilitate political oppression and war via tools such as guns.

The tales of transit that Manuela Esposito presents to us are mainly sea voyages undertaken throughout history by women as they have been forced to move

⁷ Makhosazana Xaba, “Sleep Runners”, this issue, 42.

⁸ Herbert, “Everything I Needed to Know”, 24.

⁹ Makhosazana Xaba, “The River Speaks of Ashes”, this issue, 43.

¹⁰ Xaba, “Sleep Runners”, this issue, 42.

¹¹ Xaba, “The River Speaks of Ashes”, this issue, 43.

¹² Xaba, “Digging for Freedom”, this issue, 46.

¹³ Xaba, “Who Will Wash My Feet?”, this issue, 47.

from Africa, Asia, or the Caribbean to Great Britain, continental Europe, and the Americas. The poetics of three diasporic artists – Andrea Levy, Roshini Kempadoo, and Julie Otsuka – go back in time, recalling the historical migrations such as the Middle Passage from Africa to the Caribbean, the experiences of the ‘mail order brides’ from Japan to the United States, and, more recently, the mass migrations from Africa to Europe, across the Mediterranean. The specific crafts and tools (technologies) used by these artists – writing, installations, and photographic archives – form an innovative language that conveys the influential experiences of a geographic and political displacement.

The writing in this section is characterised by a marked desire for crossing spaces. In the process of crossing seas or crossing lands, women develop strategies of survival that guarantee their inclusion in the complex maps of history, often when they would have been marginalized and discriminated against. From this perspective, Gabriela Seccardini reads the narrative strategies adopted by Croatian writer Dubravka Ugrešić in counteracting the destruction of war and in redrawing new maps that provide inclusion rather than exclusion. If oppressive governments assume the right to rewrite history, to confiscate or to destroy memory through censorship, propaganda and war, Ugrešić identifies narration, the book, and the museum as the technologies that save memory by keeping it alive. Putting fragments together to recompose an exiled life provides the exiled with the ways in which they might locate themselves in the unknown world through unknown routes. According to Seccardini, “Exile provides a style, a technique to remember and arrange the scattered pieces of a broken life in a narrative unity, whether material or verbal.”¹⁴

¹⁴ Gabriela Seccardini, “‘Life with an Adaptor, so We Don’t Burn Ourselves’: The Book, Memory and the Museum in Dubravka Ugrešić’s Poetics of Exile”, this issue, 77.

Annalisa Piccirillo finds out what happens to the transit of artworks that are dislocated from their original places of representation – or ‘homeland’ – to new critical and poetic sites of technical visibility. In particular, she analyses the diasporic performances of Emily Jacir, Shilpa Gupta, and Latifa Laâbissi as they are transformed in different genres, executed on transnational stages, and reproduced on digital platforms in order to increase the circulation and appreciation of their art in a world, such as the virtual one, which knows no boundaries. The most modern tools of technology help artists to cross worlds, and yet worlds have always been crossed by artists while availing of one of the most ancient forms of technology, that is, writing. Seen as an activity that forms or changes culture, writing is a technology that lessens physical barriers to communication, and allows people to interact freely on a global scale, traversing different worlds, cultures, and languages.

Whether the traversed worlds are stable or in (political or geologic) turmoil, writing reflects a way to be in control, to fulfill needs, or satisfy wants. In the case of Myriam J. A. Chancy, the Haitian-Canadian writer who is also a scholar, writing reflects “how it feels to remain culturally Haitian but dispossessed of one’s homeland, dealing with the joy of a return, and the non-ending fissure from pasts that continue into the present and in the future”.¹⁵ When written language fails her in

¹⁵ Myriam J. A. Chancy, abstract, this issue.

trying to fully express loss and hope in Haiti, Chancy uses photography in order “to catch some fleeting moments of beauty in the everyday”.¹⁶ Her photographs, “taken in passing, while traveling into not-easily-accessible landscapes”,¹⁷ become a creative tool to express what is not entirely possible to render in writing. For Maija Mäniken, the tension between staying and going parallels the nomadic existence of Chancy, while her writing (here in the form of an extract from her novel in progress entitled *Good Evening. My Name is Anja Ortelin*) reveals a world of self-exile, even eliciting invisibility and silence – one filled with secret voices and past memories of a mother, a father, a grandmother. The narrative plunders the author’s personal experiences as a bilingual, bicultural woman and spans thirty-five years in the American life of a Finnish model/actress, whose journey through the Mid West, New York, and Texas, crosses the layers of American society. While Chancy is trying to catch some ephemeral moments of beauty in the everyday, Mäkinen expresses her protagonist’s effort to seek refuge in some kind of friendship or human contact, one which is desired but never accomplished: “This would have been the only chance to catch the famous smile, but no one was looking.”¹⁸

In this section, Maltese writer Marie Anne Zammit offers a violent portrayal of what is a terrifying type of ethnic crossing: rape perpetrated with the purpose of ethnic cleansing. In “Holocaust in My Mind” she has the protagonist relive the traumatic episodes of violence that in 1992 took place against thousands of Muslim women from Bosnia, who were victims of systematic rape by the Serbian Security Forces. As she remembers seeing her sister murdered by the soldiers, this woman also recalls her survival in those camps where she was daily exposed to physical and psychic cruelties intended to degrade her and other fellow women. The only way out, to live beyond the hate planted by the Serbian soldiers in the wombs of the imprisoned and tortured women, is to cross this very hate by opposing to it the love and care for a new life, “a child who was innocent”.¹⁹ Even though the child is unaware of being the product of a violent history, for the mother he will always carry the traces of her unspeakable trauma. Exiled from herself and from her inner peace, this woman is confronted with an impossible finality, assaulted as she is in the mind as she was previously in the body, living “a life of ‘mental death’, when the body survives and the trauma remains”.²⁰

Xaba concludes this section as well as the previous one, with her fictional writing ‘crossing’ her poetic writing. In her poems she had spoken of ‘running bodies’ – with running being represented as a full-time activity of resistance practiced in the sleep (“Sleep runners”) as well as the memory (“My memories run in my veins”). Here, in her story entitled “Running”, the female character embodies both the role and the practice (“I’m a runner. That’s the role I’ve given myself”).²¹ She is portrayed while running, for errands or for delivering news, as part of the administrative support team of the women of the African National Congress who have decided to hold a conference to revise its draft constitution and make it non-sexist. Her role as a runner resembles her role as a soldier: “I’m moving between the two pillars of our struggle,

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Maija Mäniken, “Hiding in Full View: Immigration as Self-Exile”, this issue, 106.

¹⁹ Marie Anne Zammit, “Holocaust in My Mind”, this issue, 113.

²⁰ Ibid., 115.

²¹ Makhosazana Xaba, “Running”, this issue, 117.

²² Ibid., 118.

mass political mobilisation and the armed struggle. This conference brings in another dimension, the international mobilisation, and I am a part of it.”²² When the conference is interrupted by the news of the murder of Reverend Vukile Dladla, an important political figure in the ANC, the historical reality of the present suddenly shifts to a past episode in the personal history of the female character. She remembers that this man, whose family she visited from time to time as a distant relative, had attempted to rape her when she was only nineteen years of age. The young woman’s memories intersect with her present reality of the political conference, creating a link both between the past racial violence and the hope for a new future and between the personal and the political aspects of women’s liberation. She runs between past and present, between black and white, between women and men. Symbolically and physically, she runs away from the violence of the past and toward the hopeful future of peaceful and non-sexist, feminist values.

Diasporas in the Making

That diasporas generate aporias of meanings, in critical terms, is not necessarily a negative thing. As Teresa de Lauretis famously envisioned in her prominent earlier study on *Technologies of Gender*, dominant cultural discourses and their underlying ‘master narratives’ – be they biological, medical, legal, philosophical, or literary – tend to reproduce and re-textualize themselves, even in feminist rewritings of cultural accounts. In this respect, critiquing institutional discourses, epistemologies, social, and cultural practices means exposing their aporias to create new spaces of discourse, to rewrite cultural narratives, and to define the terms of another perspective – a view from ‘elsewhere’.²³ That ‘elsewhere’ is not a mythic distant past or some utopian future history: it is the elsewhere of discourse here and now, the blind spots of its representations. It directly speaks to what Rosi Braidotti terms as “nomadic consciousness” and points to the spaces in the margins of hegemonic discourses, to the social spaces carved in the interstices of institutions and in the cracks of the power-knowledge apparatus.²⁴

These interstices and cracks indicate a common location and experience for those who are marginalized or exiled. And yet, it is imperative to keep in mind that, as Edward Said also recognizes in his notable *Reflections on Exile*, although exile is certainly compelling to think about, in the end, undeniably, it is terrible to experience, especially in personal terms:

It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile’s life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind for ever.²⁵

²³ See Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

²⁴ See Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia Press, 1994).

²⁵ Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 1.

When the pain of exile lived as a personal experience is shared, a common language ensues, or at least the ability to fluently communicate ‘across’ the ethnic and cultural boundaries and frontiers. *Anglistica AION* offers in this special collection a communal space to host an array of different experiences – not with the intent to contain them in a unified discourse, or to heal something that cannot be healed, but for the purpose of giving hospitality to some of those knowledges and practices that are estranged and separated from their origins. In particular, the women’s *oeuvres* gathered here form a conceptual elsewhere that can perhaps offer a sense of belonging. In their variety, these *oeuvres* are transient, indomitable, irregular, and excessive, but above all, they are continuously moving – through words, bodies of water, dancing steps, sensations, sounds, and images – as if to embody the very exile they are articulating.

Recognizing the challenge of trying to present the un-representable, this issue of *Anglistica AION*, rather than trying to translate diasporic experiences for an easier understanding, sets out to undo the illusory stability of fixed identities and discourses, bursting open the bubble of ontological security for women and for men, either native or migrant. The various contributions here ‘speak’ to the notion of passing through, of cutting across different kinds and levels of identity in order to disengage the sedentary nature of words, destabilizing commonsensical meanings, and deconstructing established forms of consciousness. In this ‘scattering’ of sorts, in this critical aporias and geographical diasporas, we are all temporary guests, trying to survive in new spaces of hospitality.

To resist assimilation, the displaced women who inhabit the dedicated space in this journal become agents of creation. Together or alone, they produce gestures set on inventing or uncovering different realities. It is through their ‘making’ that immanent values are exposed. It is through their *oeuvres* – in Derrida’s sense as performative actions – that boundaries are open to unexpected, uncontainable events.²⁶ Such *oeuvres* are defined by the gestures of a ‘writing’ that is envisioned in its widest sense as a plural act of ‘making’: “I am calling it writing (*écriture*), even though it can remain purely oral, vocal, and musical: rhythmic or prosodic.”²⁷ In ‘writing’ exile, women participate in the process of constituting feminist genealogies as commonly shared discursive and political practices. Through their collaborations they establish an elsewhere, which is primarily a sort of counter-memory and a space of resistance.

Collaborations - The collaboration between and among women is acted out in the shared writing of Jill Hermann-Wilmarth and Teri Holbrook in “Becoming-Exiles in Shifting Borderlands” and of Morehshin Allahyari and Jennifer Way in “Romantic Self-Exiles”. Laura Fantone’s essay on Asian diasporas also investigates a female partnership between two contemporary artists such as Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Trinh T. Minh-ha.

Both with jobs in the American academy, Jill Hermann-Wilmarth and Teri Holbrook have been friends since they were in college. Their continued close friendship was marked by two sudden events that separated them from their own

²⁶ After the historical evolution of the classical work and the semiology in favor of the “text”, Jacques Derrida in “The University without Condition”, in *Without Alibi* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012) welcomes a return to the “oeuvre”, in the sense of its ‘making’ or ‘performing aspect’.

²⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 65.

²⁸ Jill Hermann-Wilmarth and Teri Holbrook, "Becoming-Exiles in Shifting Borderlands", this issue, 127.

²⁹ Ibid., 128.

³⁰ Ibid., 131.

³¹ Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

selves and shook them at the core: for one, an unexpected diagnosis of cancer, for the other, the birth of a daughter affected by developmental disability. The pair call their abrupt undesirable experiences "a diaspora of self", where "seismic moments when identities break" cause them to feel fractured and fragmented.²⁸ Hence, the need for their identities to build on new (however shaky) ground and elicit further connections. Hence, the expression of new desires, the sharing of anxieties and successes in order to gather sufficient energy to transform the traumatic events in positive understanding: "How do such instances, when the soil beneath us vibrates and separates, provoke us to create? How are they opportunities to articulate need, to re-imagine connections, to become community? Once we find ourselves surprised and walking among shards, how can we find the space and energy to re-form, knowing that the ground, once disrupted, is never stable?"²⁹

Availing of the theoretical and poetic support of Gloria Anzaldúa, of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the two authors record the first shock at their respective realizations, the sentiment of themselves before and after their traumatic discovery, while writing to each other. In doing this, they theorize about the invention and the becoming-community of friends who, living on the border – of life and death, hope and despair – learn how to transform loss into a surplus of meaning. They attempt to make connections using the fragments of their shattered identities. Through the use of collage, multimedia, texts in juxtaposition, and 'found compositions', Hermann-Wilmarth and Holbrook aim to articulate sense in the disorder of their lives. The connections are both personal and academic, across borders, texts, and images, and they are made visible in order to map out new territories to counteract the sudden disintegrations of identity and build around them a community that is necessary among those who have experienced personal exiles: "The community we've built is with multiple Jills and multiple Teris, who needed each other in order to learn that the margins weren't lonely. Instead, the margins can be an opened space where community is fostered to inform, bolster, and create intellectual growth central to moving forward."³⁰

These margins and this opened space need a community not only for sharing notions of medicalized living but also, in certain circumstances, for creating and sharing the artistic expression of ethnic identities. Such a special space, in postcolonial terms referred to as 'third space', is what sustains the 'writing diaspora' as theorized by Rey Chow.³¹ It is also what links the two artists Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Trinh T. Minh-ha in the analysis of Laura Fantone, an Italian scholar who teaches at U.C. Berkeley. In the effort to write about their own exiled condition, both artists, who belong to the post-war East-Asian diaspora, assertively position themselves outside of pre-conceived, Orientalist notions that tend to stereotype identities, segregating them into a ghetto. These artists seek to elude the politics of polarity and emerge on the international scene as 'the others of themselves'. Fantone's essay focuses on Cha's work in particular: this extraordinary artist, who died a premature death, lyrically inscribes the traces of her exile on the screen of her installations and on the page of her texts. Her work occurs primarily within lan-

guage (both native and non-native) and aims to simultaneously embody and explode conventional forms of belonging and identity. In one of Cha's beautiful poems the word "Exilée" literally disintegrates, revealing and re-veiling the island (the "île" in "Exilée") and isolation contained in and exceeded by it. In the same way that words lose linearity but gain expressive impact when they are fragmented, so the images that are interrupted, divided, contracted and expanded increase their power to express a full range of diasporic identities in each of the fragmented visions.

Fantone considers how Cha's gift of 'opaque transparency' in writing and vision inspires Trinh T. Minh-ha, who meets Cha in the '70s. Both artists exemplify a creative tension towards a 'third' political and cultural space, presenting Western educated audiences with a disorienting experience that does not match their expectations. Trinh T. Minh-ha intensifies the plurality and, simultaneously, the singularity of those voices, languages and expressions that resist pre-defined and univocal identities. In her vocabulary of hybridity, there are "many and one between(s)". The 'third' political and cultural space she refers to concerns a hybrid identity that keeps negotiations open "between strategic nationalism and transnational political alliance".³²

Similar cultural negotiations are present in the collaboration between the Iranian new-media artist and art activist Morehshin Allahyari and the American art historian Jennifer Way around Allahyari's installation and unpublished notes of *Romantic Self-Exiles*, consisting of postcards, a film, a 3D animation and video projecting around and through a Plexiglas maquette of Tehran. Based as it is on a "shifting and ambivalent attachment" to Allahyari's homeland, the artwork becomes "a site of emotional geography" that engages with place and memory from the perspective of leaving yet remaining connected to Iran.³³ Allahyari belongs to the second generation of Iranians who have left the native land in voluntary exile. The creative and critical elements of displacement, nostalgia, and collective memory are articulated in the unpublished notes about her installation and also in the internet exchanges with many Iranian self-exiles world-wide. The result is a 'transnational embodiment' of alternative spaces (or 'third spaces') for the Iranian nation state. As Jennifer Way indicates, the oeuvre is multi-pronged: in addition to the series of postcards with names, dates and details from all over the world, the diary of Allahyari's own mother, written at the time she was pregnant with her daughter, is transformed into a film entitled "The Recitation of a Soliloquy" that contains overlapping maps, among various other elements. In the exchange between Allahyari and Way, between those who left Teheran and those who stayed, between mother and daughter, Teheran emerges as the embodiment of the projected feelings of those who love it, knowing full well that a return home, even though imagined or remembered, is impossible.

Exposures – Among the meanings given by the *Oxford English Dictionary* for the word 'exposure' there is "the action of uncovering or leaving without shelter or defense; unsheltered or undefended condition": to be 'exposed' can indicate the condition of being vulnerable and subject to harm or danger. Whether we are thinking of migrant children, trafficked women, refugees, legal or illegal migrant

³² Trinh T. Minh-ha, quoted in Laura Fantone, "Writing Asian Diasporas: Shifting Identities in the Art of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Trinh T. Minh-ha", this issue, 154.

³³ Morehshin Allahyari and Jennifer Way, "Romantic Self-Exiles", this issue, 168.

workers, those who are away from their home(land) are ‘exposed’ to many dangers and risks, and are often in need of protection while living in unstable or poor living conditions. Martyna Bec, who moved to Berlin from Poland, with some working experience in Africa, is a young photographer who knows all about exposures, both because she takes photographs as part of her artistic career and because she is interested in bringing to light Berlin’s underworld, mostly populated by the people of the black diaspora, who are without shelter or defense.

In her series of photographs entitled *Babel*, one of the significant shots, which seems to have been taken from the basement of a building looking up toward the sky, symbolically illustrates the situation of living in an underworld and at the same time it resembles the contours of a dilapidated tower viewed from a level below the ground. The reference to the biblical tower is here obvious: in *Genesis*, a united humanity of the generations that came after the Flood spoke the same language and settled in the land of Shinar to build a tower whose top may reach unto heaven. God, however, went down to earth and confounded their speech, so that they could not understand each other, and scattered them over the face of the earth, and they stopped building the city. The city was called Babel, which in Hebrew means “to jumble”.

Jumbled clothes, jumbled pieces of furniture, the jumbled remains of a meal photographed by Bec, all contribute to give the sense of a messy, temporary, and fragmented world inhabited by people speaking different languages who are coming and going, constantly on the move. The black-and-white and sepia shots, mostly taken indoors, suggest how the European metropolis of Berlin is polarized in terms of skin color. The photographs also seem to determine that those who inhabit the metropolitan underworld are held in a kind of mental prison where through their basic functions (eating, sleeping, or making love) attempt to restore a sense of home.

In her artistic statement, Bec asks herself: “How do we function in this world? ... What is home? Is it a land, a people, a culture, or is it our own reality, our inner space?”³⁴ Looking through the lens of her camera, she realizes that, in the multicultural faces and bodies of the people whom she photographs, her own face and body are exposed. In the difficult journey of these diasporic lives and their homelessness she observes her own journey, her own homelessness: “I look for what is common in humans; I look for myself in the faces of other people; the person in front of me is my mirror. Only through this confrontation can I recognize myself: isn’t the stranger in front of me the one who defines me?”³⁵ Recalling Trinh T. Minh-ha’s de-centralizing and direct technique for documenting and empowering lives that are ‘other’ from the viewing subject, thus avoiding objectification, *Babel* is, more than a reportage, a self-exposure. Exposing her own diasporic life in the images of those people and objects she portrays, Bec tries to tell her own personal and subjective story: “[I] tried to tell my personal and subjective story, my truth. The only condition I set for myself was that the real, painful and beautiful picture should be conveyed in the most honest way, using a right and direct language.”³⁶

³⁴ Martyna Bec, “Babel”, this issue, 177.

³⁵ Martyna Bec, abstract, this issue.

³⁶ Ibid.

Other relevant meanings for ‘exposure’ in the *Oxford English Dictionary* refer to “the action of bringing to public notice; the condition of being exposed to the attention of the general public” or to the notion of ‘indecent exposure’, that is “the action of publicly exposing one’s body in an indecent manner” as well as “the manner or degree in which anything is exposed”. All of these meanings are addressed in the essay on exile, survival, and *photographie féminine* by Kelli Moore, an American scholar who works at the intersection between critical legal studies and visual culture. Moore considers exile in relation to the politicization of domestic violence through photography, in particular examining the role of new media on the production of visibility of battered women, situating these practices within ongoing debates about copyright, embodiment, and court-room aesthetics.

Moore’s argument is that the feminist photographic art portraying domestic abuse by Ana Mendieta, Donna Ferrato, and Nan Goldin is exiled and barred from museums, popular press and academic scholarship because it follows the same fate of domestic violence: battered women’s private experience is ordinarily suppressed from public discourse. In her essay, she exposes controversial images documenting gender violence that were censored and excluded from public spaces because viewed as obscene and, consequently, undertheorized. For Moore, such an exclusion represents a missed opportunity to embark upon the critical interdisciplinary understanding of the trauma of gender violence. She notes how survival, as also demonstrated by Trinh T. Minh-ha, needs to be supported by creative efforts. Even though, in the genocidal aftermath of twentieth- and twenty-first-century political displacements, the “achievements of exile as an artistic vocation” are incomprehensible, the exiled subject uses art in order to assimilate the trauma of exile or displacement.³⁷ Similarly, for Moore, images of battered women need to be exposed to the collective perceptions as well as academic knowledge of art and law in that they represent one form of such assimilation, necessary for survival.

Acknowledging the inevitable ethical challenges, the relatively overlooked work of these women has nonetheless played a crucial role in the politicization of domestic violence and the visualization of battered women. According to art curator and media theorist Ariella Azoulay, quoted by Moore, the exchange of such traumatic images that are excluded from the direct control of state corporate media invokes a “citizenry of photography”.³⁸ Through the demands of a “civil contract” it bears witness to violence in the politicized exposure of what can be called *photographie féminine*.

Events – In Laura Fantone’s analysis of the Asian diaspora contained in this issue of *Anglistica AION*, a ‘third’ hybrid poetics is found to be capable of disorienting any assumptions concerning where and how ‘the other’ should speak. In this regard, her essay concludes with words that can be applied to the scope of our collection of essays as a whole: all the works being analyzed here tend to challenge pre-existing assumptions and are mostly “situated at the edges, where things don’t end but, on the contrary, where ‘events’ begin”.³⁹ For this reason, we have placed three performance pieces and ‘events’ by female artists as an apt conclusion of

³⁷ Trinh T. Minh-ha, quoted in Kelli D. Moore, “Photographie Féminine: Exile and Survival in Ana Mendieta, Donna Ferrato, and Nan Goldin”, this issue, 180.

³⁸ Ariella Azoulay, quoted in Moore, “Photographie Féminine”, 190.

³⁹ Fantone, “Writing Asian Diasporas”, 155.

this special issue on writing exile through arts and technologies. These three performances have been part of our own hybrid journey and partnership across the Atlantic, across exiles and languages.

Josefina Báez is a performer, writer, theatre director and educator who is based in New York, but draws heavily from her own experiences as an immigrant from the Dominican Republic. She is founder and director of Ay Ombe Theatre, and expert in the practice of Performance Autology, which is a creative process based on the physical and mental autobiography of the doer. As the invited performer at the International Conference on *Diasporas and Race* at Wake Forest University (25-27 October 2012), Báez performed *Comrade, Bliss Ain't Playing* at the Reynolda House Museum of Winston-Salem, where Wake Forest is based. We have included here an excerpt from the text of that performance poem that opens with the author's declaration that she has "been migrating since birth. In fact, migration first comes / visible exactly at birth."⁴⁰ It is a statement that unexpectedly locates the act of migrating into the body, which in itself affirms that migrating is the most intimate action and part of our human, as well as cultural, *being*. Of course this perspective seems to confine the negative understanding of exile to a limited number of occurrences and invite, in exchange for and in antithesis to that very notion, ideas of mysticism, self-affirmation, spirituality, and love. In fact, when asked by Karina Bautista, in the interview herein included, to talk about her diasporic and pre-diasporic life (she left the Dominican Republic at the age of twelve), Báez states that, as she was surrounded by familial love, she did not feel exiled: "I was with my family here and I was with my family there. So I didn't see it as a big deal, being in *another country*, or anything like that."⁴¹

⁴⁰ Josephina Báez, "Dominicania - Interview with the Artist", this issue, 191.

⁴¹ Ibid., 194.

In Báez's repertoire, the works that most directly deal with issues of migration and absorption of new cultures are *Dominicanish* and *Levente no. Yolayorkdominicanyork*. The latter, also performed in a series of videos that have been included in our special issue, refers to Báez as Dominican York – a term that, according to the *Urban Dictionary*, denotes either a Dominican immigrant living and working in New York City or an American-born person of Dominican descent who was raised in NYC.⁴² In her own persona as a Dominican York, Báez embodies the struggles of migrant communities seeking to come to terms with their dislocated sense of identity. Through a rich pastiche of multiple textual and visual art forms, playfully combining elements from different cultural systems, she is able to create performances that transcend traditional attitudes toward the formation of ethnic identities and communities. In her unique 'events', notions of home and belonging, linguistic and cultural exclusivism, as well as rigid racial, gender, and ethnic articulations are challenged, exposed, and reframed.

⁴² 'Dominican York' was originally a derogatory word used to address drug dealers and criminals that were deported back to the Dominican Republic.

Another event that does not end, but constantly begins – because it functions as a conceptual Moebius ring where its narrative line reaches its end at its original starting point, but 'on the other side' – is *Traverse*, a silent 8 mm film by Melissa Ramos, an international media artist native of Manila, in the Philippines, currently based in Australia. Ramos was one of the participants in the workshop on exile, women,

arts, and technologies, conducted by Silvana Carotenuto and her research team at the 17th International Symposium on Electronic Art (ISEA 2011) in Istanbul. In that workshop, post-colonial critiques of the documentary genre were explored to elaborate a new, transnational conception of cinematic experience in films directed by exiled female artists. Being surrounded by water is an entrenched part of the cultural identity of Melissa Ramos, who migrated from the Philippines to Australia – from an archipelago of islands to a much bigger island in the Pacific Ocean.

The opening shot of *Traverse* positions the viewer on firm ground, in front of a luminous expanse of water, with the line of the horizon cutting the screen in two, thus summarizing a dualism of choices: staying or leaving, standing or walking, leaving or dying. The waves of the ocean, in the next shots, are replicated in the waves of a skirt that softly move as the woman who is wearing it walks ahead, with the video camera following her slow steps. Even though we do not see the whole body but only the legs moving, a shadow of the full silhouette is captured in the frame, as if to suggest that, in our journeys, we carry so much more than our bodies and our luggage: memory travels with us, producing islands of aloneness. The shots of the water return at the close of the short film, but this time menacing waves breaking on the rocks allude to a broken, fragmented identity. Darkness, in the end, seems to engulf the silhouette of a woman climbing the rocks, the film, and its viewers.

In an exchange of letters between Ramos and a Palestinian woman that we also publish here, the film ‘traverses’ different worlds: as Ramos’ interlocutor first evokes the emotional stability of her childhood to then move, in the physical and political background of the Mediterranean sea, to an alternating progression of violent and peaceful emotions that include fear and loss, the response of Ramos points to endurance and survival. In her visual vocabulary, water is a force that gives power to those who can understand and master it, whether by travel, by spiritual and/or physical knowledge, or by reverie: “Something I was thinking of, was the eternal gaze of the horizon, the reverie of water, the uncontrollable heavy waters, maternal water & feminine water, purity and morality, violent waters and the voice of waters.”⁴³

Survival of the feminine is also the theme of Lynn Book’s video project entitled *Escapes*, which was launched at Wake Forest University on 26 March 2013, with an introduction by Wanda Balzano reproduced in these pages. It is apt to close this special collection with Book, who reminds us, in her work as well as in her name, of the central presence of writing in artistic discourses and in the use of innovative technologies that focus on women and exile. Her video work is in fact conceived as a book of poems that come alive through her voice in its versatility and polyphony of sounds. The audio is drawn from two live performances of *The Phaedra Escapes* (2012), a collaborative concert project with Chicago sound and media artist Shawn Decker.

Escapes revives the mythological figure of Phaedra into a contemporary sign of escape. In Book’s own work she becomes “a divining tool used to locate vo-

⁴³ Melissa Ramos, “Traverse”, this issue, 212.

⁴⁴ Lynn Book, “Escapes”, this issue, 213.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

luptuous frictions between release and containment, stasis and freedom”.⁴⁴ Her story of exile resonates in the many stories of actual women who successfully survive the hardship of migration. As Phaedra has migrated from the Greek plays of Sophocles and Euripides to the Roman representations of Seneca and Ovid, from Baroque operas to contemporary ones, she “becomes the ideal escape body of our time, resonant with multiple histories and radiant with propositions for possible futures”.⁴⁵ *Escapes* is, both for Lynn Book and for this volume, a ‘beginning’: it is Volume 1 of a larger video project comprised of three volumes entitled *UnReading for Future Bodies*. In Volume 2, *Derangements* will explore the Chimera figure with its frightening but ultimately fluid and freeing boundaries. *Fragmenta* is the title of the third volume that will weave together multiple voices of real women and girls from across times and cultures whose desire for knowledge transcends its challenges.

As ‘escaping’ means rejecting oppressive systems and getting safely out of painful or dangerous situations, this final contribution helps us envisage how writing, the arts, and the imaginative use of technology enable exiles, immigrants, refugees, and other expatriates to be free from detention and control, and free from an oppressive or irksome condition. Our collection, enriched by wide-ranging contributions by and about women, provides a refreshing escape from the realm of male-dominated interpretations. It engages readers and viewers in a performative set of experiences that often explode conventional order and introduce new modes of organizing understanding and inspiring possibilities. This work, placed at the end of our collection, offers itself as an opportunity to leave open the critical discussions on the subject of women and writing, the arts, and technologies, and to begin afresh by circulating new debates and dialogues once again, escaping – at least in this issue – a conclusive, categorical ending.

We would like to take leave by expressing our personal need and desire to negotiate between home and abroad – between a here, a there, and an elsewhere – which has enthused us to embark on an undetermined, but extremely enriching journey through different cultures, languages, stories, experiences, and dwellings. Having in mind Trinh T. Minh-ha’s compelling study dedicated to exile and entitled *Elsewhere, Within Here: Immigration, Refugeeism and the Boundary Event*, we believe that we have brought an array of multifaceted complexities within the ‘here’ of *Anglistica AION* and of ourselves (as editors, contributors, and the subjects of their analysis) to then bring the ‘within here’ elsewhere.⁴⁶ This alternating double movement – to the other and from the self, from the ‘elsewhere’ to a ‘within here’ and back again – is indeed the drive that characterizes the predicament of exile, its open wound and its embodiment of radical difference.

⁴⁶ Trinh T. Minh-ha, “Other Than Myself, My Other Self”, in *Elsewhere, Within Here: Immigration, Refugeeism and the Boundary Event* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

Shahrnush Parsipur

Artist's Statement

As a writer I began my work at the age of 14. I wrote a short article for a magazine without mentioning my name. They published it. So I wrote more and more. At 67, I have now 14 books published and, in the meanwhile, I have translated several books into Persian.

Without writing I wouldn't know what to do. Now, at 67, I haven't much to write. I know that it is very difficult to change the world. It is almost impossible. When you think of changing the world, it is the moment when the world is changing you. When we are young, we are serious. As an older person, you always have a smile on your lips. Life is more beautiful and the sun is more 'the sun'. At night you can look at the moon, and you are happy with your life. You don't want to change anything, so you have nothing to write. I am sorry that I can't look carefully at the sky. The lights in the street don't allow me to see the sky and the stars.

At the same time, I am sorry that I can't go back to my native land. 'There' all my books are banned, and 'here' nobody reads my books because they are in Persian. I live in a limbo, but I smile, because life is beautiful.

I think of death. I like that too. With death I can mix with the earth, and help the flowers grow better. But I can't write about death, because it is like life, and it is difficult to write about life.

Every week I run three programs for Radio Zamaneh in the Netherlands. As material for the programs, I concentrate on the stories I want to write. After that, writing with style is very difficult.

The only message I have for you is that life is beautiful, just like death.

Shahrnush Parsipur

Richmond, California,
February 26, 2013

The Blue Spring of Katmandu* (Tehran, 1969)

The window in my room overlooks a large garden with a well and a green stretch of poppies and petunias. Sometimes I see the owner of the garden pulling the weeds. From a distance he seems old. He wears blue overalls and works on the flowers while wearing gloves. He cuts the hedges, pulls the weeds, and waters the lawn. And when he is done he takes off his gloves, sits on the bench by the gravel road, and looks at the lilies floating in the pond.

My room is a very nice room. It has a big window facing the garden and another opening onto a busy crowded street. Everyday the sun is guest of my room's mosaic floor covering it until noontime. Somehow I have this silly notion that if I sit by the window overlooking the street, I will see lovers pass by hand in hand. Of course, through guess and presumption the condition of being in love can be projected onto passersby. Here people do not kiss each other on busy streets, nor do they walk hand in hand in public. Perhaps they would do so in very narrow and uncrowded streets. But our street, of course, is wide and full of speeding cars. I always think that somehow two blocks away from our house everybody is in love. But, of course, that is an altogether silly thought.

My room is a very nice room. The walls are blue, and the garden can be seen in the mirror. The ceiling is white, very white, and there are four cherubs, one of which has a broken nose, in each of its four corners – cute, chubby cherubs with no pupils in their eyes. I have put a table and chair next to the garden window, and I eat my lunch and dinner there. My bed is in the northeast corner of the room along the street-side window...and there is a corpse in it. He has a regal countenance and skin that has turned amber in death. This man has been dead ever since I can remember. He is tall and broad-shouldered with a graceful mustache. He has a copper crown – rough on the surface – its prongs shaped like the parapets of ancient castle. It covers half of his salt-and-pepper hair and part of his high yellow forehead. His clothes are made of satin, his robe of red velvet. The hem of the robe is embroidered with white thread in the shape of lilies. The person who made the robe did not have very good taste. The lilies are not identical, and the hem is threadbare. The dead man has a silver ring with a big turquoise stone. The ring has become black with age. His relatively long fingernails are dirty. The skin of his fingers is wrinkled. And though his face looks fifty, he is much older than that.

I exercise when I wake up in the morning. I stand before the garden window and exercise – light, free, and liberating movements. I take deep breaths, and, when I get out of the shower, the sound of the samovar boiling has already filled the room. Then I drink my tea on the table by my window and look at the flowers in the garden. Sometimes I watch the cockroaches climb up the legs of the bed and disappear inside the man's velvet robe.

* “The Blue Springs of Kathmandu” is published in Farsi in the collection *Tea Ceremony in the Presence of the Wolf* (Adab-e Sarf-e Chay Dar Huzur-e Gurg; Los Angeles: 1993). This English translation was also contained in *Tea Ceremony in the Presence of the Wolf*, trans. by Steve Macdowell and Afshin Nassiri (Portland, OR: Nur, 2011), 20-25.

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I used to sleep next to the man on the bed. But I could never change the bottom sheet; moving the corpse was too difficult for me. He has such a forbidding appearance that one does not dare touch him. So I could only cover half of the bed with clean linen. Sometimes, in the middle of the night, I used to wake up and find myself close to the man with my hand on his chest. It seemed to me that the man was staring at the ceiling.

The cockroaches were the worst. Sometimes one would lose its way from under the man's robe and come to my side of the bed. And, when I would move my arm or take a deep breath, it would pause for a moment, then flee in haste. I would feel its footsteps for a while on my arm. What an awful feeling! Late I bought a leather reclining chair and put it by the window next to the table. I have been sleeping there for a long time now.

I feed the canaries every morning and dust the room until it shines all over. But I can't do anything about the cockroaches. Their number increases every day. I bought poison and cautiously poured it under the man's robe. But it didn't help.

So, that is the work I do before lunchtime.

Again I sit by the garden window, and, while I eat, I look at the noontime garden. It looks damp and humid. The idleness of the afternoon begins. Sometimes I take a nap, and at other times I walk on my tiptoes around the room. Sometimes I knit, and sometimes I fix the holes in the man's robe.

Then, in the afternoon, the newspaper boy comes and rings the doorbell. I know his ring, two shorts and a long one. Immediately I lower the basket down the window, and the boy puts the paper in it.

"Have they caught the murderers?" I ask shouting down to him.

"They captured one. The rest haven't been found yet," he replies.

The newspaper boy and I both admire the murderers, but we never express it to each other. They say that would not be nice.

The newspaper is a real nice thing. One could say that if the paper didn't exist the paper boy wouldn't have existed either, and that if the paper boy didn't exist, neither would the whole world. I don't really know what's going on out there. Sometimes I hear cars blowing their horns. I see people coming and going and cannot even find out if they are in love or not. The newspaper is full of people. People buy stocks. People kiss each other before the cameras and get their photo printed in the paper. A group of them goes to war. With the paper I go around the world – to Chile and Bolivia. In the jungles of Bolivia – to be safe from poison ivy and mosquitoes – I spread the paper on the ground, lie down on it, and watch the sweaty green trees overhead with the yellow sap flowing down their trunks and becoming brown at the bottom. Ducking so as not to get shot by bullets flying overhead, I hold the paper in my hand and swim across the Suez Canal. The Canal looks the same as in the poster for the movie *Lawrence of Arabia*. I play on a slide in Siberia, and in Vietnam I dress the wounds of the injured and cover them with the newspaper.

Such is the newspaper. Sometimes I talk to the newspaper boy before I buy it. One day near the end of spring, I remember asking him, “What is new in the bazaar?”

“Black cherries have just come into season,” he responded.

“Will you get me some?” I asked and threw the money down to him. The boy got me a bag full of black cherries and sent them up in the basket.

“Do you want to come upstairs?” Suddenly it occurred to me to ask. He nodded and walked toward the door. I hauled on the chains connected to the door and started to wash the cherries. As the boy’s footsteps were getting closer, my movement grew faster and the samovar boiled harder. Then I saw the boy’s shy face through the half open doors. For a while he looked at me with curiosity and timidity, as I watched him and his changing emotions. It had been a long time since I had seen a human being up close. He had a red face like somebody from the mountains, and his plump cheeks were still chapped from the weather a few days ago. His eyes were hazel, and his brown hair covered his forehead. He looked like the cherubs in the corner of the ceiling, the only difference being the blood circulating under his cheeks. This you could see without any difficulty.

“Come and sit over there,” I said. Awkwardly he walked toward the chair, sat on it, and with curious eyes looked at the cherubs.

“They look like you, don’t they?” I remarked. He blushed and turned toward the garden. Smiling at him, I put the cherry basket before him and sat in a way that would block his view of the corpse. Droplets of water were rolling down the cherries and their bright color had an incredible sheen. As a matter of fact, everything seemed incredible as I began to think that if I could somehow get two blocks away, I would positively find people in love – positively.

“Do you like murderers?” I asked. He nodded.

“Me too, and if they need help I would hide them in my house...Do you know them?” I asked eagerly. He shook his head and suddenly saw the corpse. He froze, and it felt as if the samovar suddenly stopped boiling. I said, “Perhaps once in the old days, he too was murderer, and if you and I had been around we could have loved him.”

“Forgive me for coming in with dirty shoes...”, he said with his eyes frozen on the corpse.

“It doesn’t matter, now eat some cherries,” I interrupted, pushing the basket toward him. Then I went to the other window to get some damn thing or another and, when I turned around, he was gone.

I said all this to explain why one could sometimes feel so depressed. Of course, sometimes nobody comes to visit and one gets very lonely. Some other times one doesn’t want a visitor, but still feels depressed. I sometimes get like that and sit on the couch for hours watching my big toe move, or I pace the room. And I have to confess that even the newspaper can do nothing for me in such an unhappy condition – whichever country one goes to there’s a long and wide street named after the leader of that country and then there’s a big square with a large

statue of him in the middle. It is in this way that monotony depresses a person. A depression such as this hit me at the sunset of the day I went to Katmandu. The previous evening I had read something about Katmandu in the paper, something about its temples. Katmandu has so many temples. I went to sleep that night, woke up and cleaned the room in the morning, had breakfast, made lunch and ate it. Then I had a ridiculous, boring afternoon watching my toe for a thousand hours and occasionally wiggling it. Eventually boredom gave way to hallucination, and I went to Katmandu. Katmandu was on top of a tall mountain and from a distance its temples' towers seemed to touch the clouds. Along with other people, I was hiking up a road. The newspaper columnist had forgotten to write how long it took to reach the city via the road. In fact, he had completely forgotten about the road. It was a vague, complicated, and mountainous road, for Katmandu is a city in the mountain. It was noontime and very humid. My whole body was sweaty, and the city looked like a mirage in the distance. Then we reached it. It was the same as I could have imagined it to be. I can never pay attention to details. I don't feel like doing that when I'm outside my home. Katmandu had a major street named after the king, and at the end of that street there was a square with his statue in it. The columnist was correct in saying that the city had many temples. I visited a few and then went to a temple with a large stone-paved yard. Grass had grown in between the cobblestones. The temple had a blue dome and a few towers. The people's faces were hazy and unclear. Actually, I didn't enter any temples. I only entered their courtyards. I imagined that they were burning incense inside, and that a man was sitting at a corner chanting and that perhaps a few corpses were sitting, waiting inside the shrine for burial ceremonies. Perhaps there were things like that inside the temple. I lay down on the stone-paved floor. I was very tired, and the newspaper in my hands was sweaty. Above my head there was the blue dome of Katmandu's afternoon sky, the ceiling of my prison and temple. The sky was very blue, and in the west streaks of sunlight penetrated down, and the composition of the blue of the sky and the blue of the temple's domes and the sunlight made white streaks that sometimes arched to the middle of the sky. And in such a state I fell asleep in Katmandu.

Translated from the Persian
by Steve MacDowell & Afshin Nassiri
January 1992
Los Angeles, CA

Artist's Statement

When we think of 'exile poets', Milosz or Brodsky might come to mind, but female writers qualify for that romantic label as well. I think of Clarice Lispector and Jamaica Kincaid who found their creative voices in new worlds they created for themselves wherever they woke up each day, as did America's first poet of note, Anne Bradstreet, and Phillis Wheatley, America's first black poet, brought as a slave from Africa, at age eleven. All could wear the name tag of 'exile', and yet perilous voyages across the Atlantic Ocean are not necessarily essential to a writer's self identification as an exile. A short train trip or stagecoach ride from Hadley, Massachusetts, to Amherst might make a young writer feel ever more strongly that she is an exile, even if she rarely leaves her own home, as was true of America's most famous poet, Emily Dickinson. She would perch out of sight at the top of the stairs and chat with visitors down below, an exile from family and neighbours, and yet communicating with the world through her writings.

I too was an exile within my own country. After graduating from college in Tennessee, I took a small suitcase of clothes, three books, and my Royal portable typewriter, and climbed aboard a Greyhound bus to New York City. Many writers have followed that path. Mississippi author Willie Morris wrote a memoir about his own journey, titled *North toward Home*. Many artists and writers are self-imposed 'exiles' from their childhood homes in seeking fame and fortune in other cities, other countries. To be an exile, voluntarily, requires a mix of courage and foolishness. My poem in this issue, titled "Everything I Needed to Know", includes the phrase: "we walk through the door / exiled into the future". We walk through a door in our young lives, making a bet that we will achieve something, we will find love, a steady income, our name on the cover of a slim volume of verse or even in large letters on the cover of a fat novel. Perhaps photography will prove a lady's merit (think of Margaret Bourke-White or Diane Arbus), or painting during an 'exile' career in France (Joan Mitchell) or in New York City (Alice Neel).

In my poem cited above I mention discarded dresses lying on the floor, like old ideas of social roles or old ambitions that no longer satisfy. Poets and painters must go ahead and get on that bus. As for the three books I brought to New York with me: one was a biography of artist Vincent Van Gogh, an inspiration to me as to what an exile's mission might be or should be. And the link to technology? Why my typewriter, of course! I loved that portable typewriter that accompanied me to the future.

Everything I Needed to Know

Bright sun. Polished cotton dress with swoopy skirt popular in the Fifties. We wear crinolines under those swirling skirts, a nod to Nashville in 1855, oh, but not the year I graduate from high school. I arrive for the 1955 ceremony in a Buick. Yellow shoes with little kitten heels, my first pumps date me. (This is the last year grads wear dresses and suits, in '56 robes are required, a more ceremonial approach, dignity stapled to ceremony.) The dress, shoes, white cotton gloves are purchased in chic downtown stores in the last year before the mall invasion. Our senior photographs are taken at a downtown store too, me in pearls, a borrowed necklace rests on my sweaty neck. The photographer airbrushes out teen-age flaws, providing a smooth matte skin for all of us, the class of 1955. We gaze trustingly into a lens promising everything, nothing. You be the judge. Oh, the stockings too, everything is new, in our *annus horribilis*. Oh, we are free, we will be, soon enough. Dresses with inevitable stains fall into puddles on the floor. We walk through the door, exiled into the future. Will we fail or succeed, will our deodorant protect us for the next fifty years. Sixty?

Suspended Ethical Space – the Sky? This Mid-air Ek-sistence

Suspended ethical space – the sky?

...in the sky, sense is not already given.
yes the frisking and the passports and
“Ma’am you have to take off your jacket.”
the unveiling of bodies with laser technology –
X-race and other requirements.

The charade of looking as unsuspecting as possible,
which some people cannot help but do
because they are viewed by suspicious eyes,
continues inside the plane. Would you
like some wine? Some sleeping pills?
On board entertainment? Lights off.

When the sun glows through the shut blinds,
like a metaphor for being in heaven,
you notice that you’re above the clouds
and you have to catch your breath
just to remind yourself that you still can.

This Mid-air Ek-sistence

In mid-air, time doesn’t stop; it envelops.
Post-flight, my identity still feels scattered;
a gut-twisting anticipation gnaws from the inside –
anticipating longing
for the worlds I’ve left behind.
I sleep the jetlag off and try to dream of stasis.

I used to dream of overflowing,
of spilling from the seams of my skin because
it didn’t feel *mine* enough.
Pulled and pushed away, I tore myself off from the budding roots.

I wanted to know whether I would be enough
to nurture me. Whether I could move myself.
Kept dreaming about my mom, outraged,
because she found out that I dream of her.

The newness wears out shortly after landing,
then the same sorrows rise up again.
More more more so many more scabs than before actually.
Much more otherness sedimented on my bones.
Which, on one hand, cultivates my solid posture.
Until I remember how – I let myself unravel;
gave myself away just to feel a closeness.

“Waiting is Forbidden”: Exile in Contemporary Palestinian-American Women’s Writing and Art

The Past of the Land, the Land of the Past



Fig. 1: Mona Hatoum, *Waiting is Forbidden*, 2006-2008, enamel on steel, 11-5/8 x 15-3/4 inches. Source: <http://www.artcritical.com/2009/02/20/review-panel-february-2009/mona-hatoum/>, 8 July 2013*

Born in Lebanon from a Palestinian family and currently living in Berlin and London, Mona Hatoum has a piece of artwork on exhibit at the Contemporary Art Collection of the Brooklyn Museum in New York. It consists of a blue enamelled street sign, made in Egypt at a sign-making shop. The sign bears the Arabic script for No Loitering, which has been translated by the sign maker into Waiting is Forbidden. The slippery grounds of translation deliver here an entirely new and ambiguous meaning through the enamelled message. The artist's roots, as well as her routes, take part in the disclosing narration that the sign bears: waiting is not allowed, movement is impelling, unavoidable, enforced. Exile is announced in a street sign thrown into the fickleness of translation.

Hatoum exposes the unexpected possibilities disclosed by semantic slippages, or what Salman Rushdie calls the 'gains' of translation.¹ In the process, however, the artist's own positionality cannot but take issue with the 'intimation to move' that the sign carries. Hatoum's Palestinian descent surfaces, revealing the labours of a lost land in the compulsion/coercion to move, and also in the anxiety propelled by a message that 'forbids waiting'. Moving is unavoidable, and there is also no time to waste, no waiting. Interestingly, in the light of today's movements in many Arab countries, and of the ongoing and growing occupation of Palestinian soil by Israel, the resonance that the sign's 'mistranslation' carries is even stronger: time has really run out, and there can be no more waiting.

Any discourse on and around Palestine cannot avoid treading on borderlines, dispossession and exile. As Rashid Khalidi writes,

The quintessential Palestinian experience, which illustrates some of the most basic issues raised by Palestinian identity, takes place at a border, an airport, a checkpoint: in short, at any of those many modern barriers where identities are checked and verified. What happens to Palestinians at these crossing points brings home to them how much they share in common as a people.²

* I have used three images in this article and have tried to contact copyright owners where possible. If you feel that I am in breach of your copyright, please contact me. I apologize unreservedly for any misuse.

¹ Salman Rushdie claims that "it is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained"; *Imaginary Homelands. Essays and Criticism* (London: Viking, 1991), 17.

² Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 1.

Indeed, the Palestinian condition can perhaps be considered as paradigmatic of the exilic discourse of identity, to the point that, as the above quote underlines, being ‘out of place’ has become a constitutive part of contemporary Palestinian identity. *Out of Place* is, of course, the title of Edward Said’s memoir (1999), in which he elaborates on the predicaments that brought him and his family to become exiles, somehow reclaiming a personal history made of an almost congenital dislocation, of always ‘being wrong’ and ‘out of place’.³ Interestingly, Said mentions almost immediately, in the preface to the book, the importance of language and of the space in which translation places anyone caught in the borderlands of movement:

interesting for me as author was the sense I had of trying always to translate experiences that I had not only in a remote environment but also in a different language. Everyone lives life in a given language; everyone’s experiences therefore are had, absorbed and recalled in that language. The basic split in my life was the one between Arabic, my native language, and English, the language of my education and subsequent expression as a scholar and teacher, and so trying to produce a narrative of one in the language of the other – to say nothing of the numerous ways in which the languages were mixed up for me and crossed over from one realm to the other – has been a complicated task.⁴

Said’s reflections on the peculiarity of what might be called ‘bilingual remembrance’ are certainly common to most of today’s postcolonial writers who find themselves – by choice or otherwise – inhabiting ‘the language of the other’. What is particularly significant with regard to Said’s words is the strong sense of the ‘split’ that he underlines, both in history and in his personal story, before and after the *nakba*;⁵ before and after exile; and before and after the English language. This view is common among writers and poets who are considered ‘classic’ in the narration of modern Palestinian identity, such as, first and foremost, Mahmoud Darwish and Samih al-Qasim.⁶ Darwish’s large body of work spans from the 1960s to his death in 2007 and is considered a milestone in the construction of modern Palestinian identity. He became initially famous for his peremptorily political poem *Identity Card*:

Write down!
I am an Arab
And my identity card number is fifty thousand
I have eight children
And the ninth will come after a summer
Will you be angry?

Write down!
I am an Arab
Employed with fellow workers at a quarry
I have eight children
I get them bread
Garments and books
From the rocks...
I do not supplicate charity at your doors
Nor do I belittle myself at the footsteps of your chamber
So will you be angry?⁷

³ Edward Said, *Out of Place. A Memoir* (New York: Knopf, 1999), 3.

⁴ Ibid., xiii.

⁵ *Nakba* means ‘catastrophe’ in Arabic; the term is used to indicate the displacement of Palestinians following the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

⁶ Tawfiq Zayyad (1929-1994) was a well-known Palestinian poet and politician, who wrote passionately about and fought for the Palestinians who remained in Israel after 1948.

⁷ Mahmoud Darwish, “Identity Card”, in John Mikhail Asfour, *When the Words Burn: An Anthology of Modern Arabic Poetry, 1945-1987* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1992), 214.

Darwish's poetics grew, over the years, into a more intimate, melancholy epic of displacement, constantly facing the past of a lost land. In "The Earth is Closing in on Us", the sense of irrecoverable loss is suffocating:

The earth is closing in on us, pushing us through the last passage, and we tear off our limbs
to pass through.
The earth is squeezing us. I wish we were its wheat so we could die and live again. I
wish the earth was our mother
So she'd be kind to us. I wish we were pictures on the rocks for our dreams to carry
As mirrors. We saw the faces of those to be killed by the last of us in the last defence
of the soul.
We cried over their children's feast. We saw the faces of those who'll throw our children
Out of the windows of this last space. Our star will hang up mirrors.
Where should we go after the last frontiers? Where should the birds fly after the last sky?
Where should the plants sleep after the last breath of air? We will write our names with
scarlet steam.
We will cut off the hand of the song to be finished by our flesh.
We will die here, here in the last passage. Here and here our blood will plant its olive tree.⁸

⁸ Darwish, "The Earth is Closing in on Us", in Mahmoud Darwish, Adonis, Samih al-Qasim, *Victims of a Map: A Bilingual Anthology of Arabic Poetry* (London: Saqi Books, 1984), 13.

The promise of the olive tree growing out of the Palestinian blood delivers some sense of hope in the closing of the poem; yet Darwish's words are bearers of an inevitable tragedy, of an irreversibility that leaves no room for recovery. The recurrence of the word 'last' – "last passage", "last frontier", "last sky" – anchors the poem to the fear of an unspeakable death threatening Palestine. Two elements run through the entire poem: the 'earth', that appears in the title and in the first lines, immediately shown as a suffocating 'last space', and the 'us' of the title and the 'we' that appears in the rest of the poem, construing a collective first person plural, which constitutes a strong feature of Palestinian identity throughout all of Darwish's work.

Samih al-Qasim, another major contemporary Arab poet, though scarcely translated into English, also presents a fundamental poetic narration of the injustices endured by Palestinians. Qasim's poetry resonates with a much drier and more 'modern' style compared to Darwish's, but it reiterates the constant call towards a past struck by loss. The poetry of Qasim is profoundly and openly political, and, even in his more intimate verses, the sense of a regretful loss is clear:

I planted a tree
I scorned the fruit
I used its trunk as firewood
I made a lute
And played a tune
I smashed the lute
Lost the fruit
Lost the tune
I wept over the tree⁹

⁹ Samih al-Qasim, "Confessions at Midday", in *ibid.*, 57.

One of Qasim's more political and best known poems, titled "Travel Tickets", looks not at the past but at a future of peace, still carrying the burden of violence and death:

On the day you kill me
You'll find in my pocket
Travel tickets
To peace,
To the fields and the rain,
to people's conscience.
Don't waste the tickets.¹⁰

¹⁰ Ibid., 59.

Over time, both Darwish's and Qasim's poetic works have undergone changes in the style and, especially, in the imagery they incorporate. In particular, in the later part of his life, Darwish began to reflect on the immobility in the construction of Palestinian identity, coming to realize that he "had to defend the land of the past and the past of the land, the land of language and the language of the land",¹¹ while negotiating the conviction that history is an open space, "a scene through which peoples, civilizations and cultures could circulate freely".¹²

In his most recent poems, Qasim too seems to have turned to more composite and nuanced variations in both imagery and style, spanning from classical Arab to Biblical references, from ancient history to modern imagery.¹³ The breadth of Qasim's poetics, therefore, has expanded, and now it embraces a complex discourse of dislocation and denial.

In a historical overview of the development of Palestinian poetry over the second half of the twentieth century, Julianne Hammer synthesizes:

Poetry immediately after 1948 and before 1967 reflects the shock of the uprooting and the years of disorientation, dispersal and hopelessness. The developments after 1967, with the emergence of the Palestinian national movement and the formation of political and military resistance inside as well as outside Palestine, show a more self-confident and nationalistic tone. What remains is the longing for the homeland, its recreation, imagination, and description in Palestinian poetry as well as art.¹⁴

The longing for the homeland, the sense of mourning for the excruciating pain of dislocation and occupation, dominate the discourse on Palestine in much of the past century, as does the continuous search for history. The tension is towards a lost past that one cannot return to. What seems at work here is a 'technology of return', to use a Foucauldian term that Teresa de Lauretis uses in her theorization of the 'technologies of gender': 'return', the great, overarching theme of Palestinian (and, often, postcolonial) identity can be read not only as an intrinsic desire of the exiled but also as the product of social technologies, institutional discourses, epistemologies, and critical practices.¹⁵

¹¹ Darwish, "I Discovered That the Earth Was Fragile and the Sea Light", in Mahmoud Darwish with Elias Sanbar, Simone Bitton, Pierre Joris, *boundary 2*, 26.1, 99 Poets/1999: An International Poetics Symposium (Spring, 1999), 81.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ See Noha Radwan, Review of Al-Qasim, *Sadder than Water: New and Selected Poems* and Emil Habiby, *Saraya, the Ogre's Daughter: A Palestinian, Journal of Palestine Studies*, 36.4 (Summer 2007), 117.

¹⁴ Julianna Hammer, *Palestinians Born in Exile: Diaspora and the Search for a Homeland* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 62.

¹⁵ See Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays in Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), in particular 2-3.

This ‘technology of return’ does not leave space for the slippages of translation that Hatoum thematises in her work. The land of the past and its pain do not allow for much of the ambiguity carried by Hatoum’s sign.

Dissemination and polyglossia

Darwish’s generation of published Palestinian intellectuals and poets is predominantly male.¹⁶ Interestingly, a new and groundbreaking discourse on Palestinian identity is being constructed by a generation of women writers and poets, who dwell in the ‘split’ that Said refers to, while embracing the multiple pulls of their dislocation. These authors do not record a split between, for example, Arabic and English; rather, they inhabit both, or even more languages, thus settling inside the conflagration that the concept of identity sets off. They respond to the compulsion to ‘return’ to a lost motherland, and also to the fragmentation of the soil beneath their feet, in an explosion that leaves dissemination in its wake. Contemporary Palestinian identity becomes, then, disseminated, no longer hanging in an interrupted history.

As illustrated above, Darwish does tackle, in his later production, the perils of a crystallization of history; this same road is pursued by the critical aesthetics of contemporary artists and writers of the Palestinian diaspora. On the other hand, contemporary women authors of the diaspora tend to construe multiple discourses of identity, disengaging Palestinian identity from the immobility of oppression, negation and colonization, through a dialogic interplay of identity negotiations. Indeed, while Darwish engages in the ‘mobilization’ of a Palestinian historical discourse, the contemporary poets of the Palestinian diaspora produce exactly the disengagement from what Darwish called “the land of language and the language of the land”.¹⁷ The cultural and linguistic juxtaposition that makes up the poetry of the contemporary Palestinian diaspora does not, in the vein of Darwish’s or Qasim’s works, respond to the need to re-write the past. Rather, it builds a multiple present that brings a powerful interruption in the crystallized edifice of Palestine as unchanging, unmoving, and paralysed in the imposed denial of its very existence.

One prominent author of the contemporary generation of Palestinian diasporic poets is Nathalie Handal. Born in Haiti from a Palestinian family, Handal has lived in the US, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East.¹⁸ Her work explores the construction of her own identity in connection to her Arab heritage and her Palestinian descent, while also connecting with a wider community of subaltern subjectivities. In particular, her 2005 collection of poems *The Lives of Rain* investigates the themes of exile and Palestine, marking the path of her personal identity within a multivocal and multilingual journey – one that embodies Hatoum’s invitation/coercion to move.

The Lives of Rain declares its theme explicitly in the opening poem, “The Doors of Exile”:

¹⁶ On Palestinian women writers after 1948, and on the failure to read into the gender-specific poetics of such writers, see Dorit Gottesfeld, “Harbingers of Feminism: A New Look at the Works of Pioneering Palestinian Women Writers”, *Journal of Levantine Studies*, 1.2 (Winter 2011), 75-101.

¹⁷ Darwish, “I Discovered That the Earth Was Fragile and the Sea Light”, 81.

¹⁸ Handal has published four books of poetry – the most recent titled *Poet in Andalusia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012) – and several plays; she has edited the anthology *The Poetry of Arab Women* (Northampton: Interlink Books, 2000) and co-edited *Language for a New Century: Contemporary Poetry from the Middle East, Asia, and Beyond* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008).

The shadows close a door
 this is loneliness:
 every time we enter a room we enter a new room
 the hours of morning growing deep into our exile
 prayers stuck in between two doors
 waiting to leave to enter
 waiting for memory to escape
 the breath of cities.¹⁹

This first poem voices the pain of exile and non-belonging, where every room is always “a new room”. In the first section of the book, Handal begins by embracing a ‘we’ that still holds on to a community unified in memory, prayers, and loneliness. It is later in the book, starting with the second section, that the poet multiplies the levels of identity construction, throwing it into the uncertainty of polyglossia and absolute translation. One prime example of this fluidity of language and identity is the poem titled “El Almuerzo de Tía Habiba”:

Half past six in the morning
 the kitchen is wide awake,
 no time for many cups of coffees
 for Tía Liliana, Tía Mercedes,
 Tía Rosette, Tía Esperanza,
 Tía Josefina, Tía Margarita,
 Tía Layla and Tío Waide
 are coming for some of Tía Habiba’s
 tomalitos, lamb, hummos, laban, and grape leaves.²⁰

Straight from the title, in a cozy family scene, Handal introduces a plural identity: “Tía Habiba” [aunt Habiba] announces, in her very name, a threshold constantly carried within herself, calling from inside that line, separating and juxtaposing, at once, Spanish and Arabic appellations. The list of names that appears at the fourth line of the poem reiterates the threshold, as does the cohabitation of “tomalitos” and “lamb, hummos, laban, and grape leaves”. Traces of ‘elsewhere’ are scattered throughout the following lines, introducing more unexpected levels of identity translations, or simply more processes of identity negotiations:

“Dios mío niña, you are not dressed,” Juanita tells me.
 Her Indian features recite poems her ancestors tell her
 the way Tía Habiba’s deep curved eyes
 tell me about the holy land.
 “Por favor, it is not morning yet,” I respond.
 These are what my Friday mornings
 are like when I visit my relatives in Torreón, Coahuila,
 a little ciudad in México.²¹

The slippage of Hatoum’s enamelled, travelling message is fully incorporated in Handal’s poetics, as she disarticulates the univocality of the Palestinian discourse on the claim for negated nationhood through the deliberate choice of code-switching and

¹⁹ Nathalie Handal, “The Doors of Exile”, in *The Lives of Rain* (Northampton: Interlink Books, 2005), 1.

²⁰ Handal, “El Almuerzo de Tía Habiba”, in *Lives of Rain*, 31.

²¹ Ibid.

multilingualism. Samia Mehrez's observation on 'radical bilingualism' seems appropriate here, and applicable to strategic multilingualism; Mehrez indicates 'bilingualism' as

... a space that subverts hierarchies, whether they are linguistic or cultural; where separate systems of signification and different symbolic worlds are brought together in a relation of perpetual interference, interdependence and intersignification.²²

²² Samia Mehrez, "The Subversive Poetics of Radical Bilingualism: Post-Colonial Francophone North African Literature", in Dominick LaCapra, ed., *The Bounds of Race* (Cornell University Press, 1991), 261.

²³ Ibid.

This perpetual interfering and intersignification inevitably leads to a subversion of narrative/historical hierarchies. Palestine becomes more than the negated nation, leaking outside its walled up borders, astray from road maps and corridors. The Palestinian question shows itself loudly for what it is: the paradox of the democracy-bearing Western nations that allow and fuel the negation of another nation at its very frontiers. Handal's polyglossia casts the Palestinian question into the world through its diaspora, bringing together what Mehrez calls "separate systems of signification and different symbolic worlds in a relation of perpetual interference".²³ Palestine thus comes to be narrated in the interstice between languages, between untranslatability and absolute translation.

A similar discourse resonates in the poetics of other poets of Palestinian descent. In particular, Suheir Hammad, born in Amman from Palestinian parents, works less with polyglossia, incorporating instead the multiplicity of spoken-word poetry and performance, which is also reflected in the graphics of her poems.²⁴ Her poems are indeed written in lower-case letters, a feature which appears as an echo of the Arabic language (which has no capital letters) inside the English she (mostly) uses for her poems. Furthermore, some fragments of her poems contain Arabic words that serve to convey the distance of dispossession. The poem titled "dedication", included in *Born Palestinian, Born Black* (2010), reads:

his name could've been
ahmad mustafa jihad
could've been
mohammad yousef hatem
his name was hammad

standing on a mountaintop in jordan
looking over the vast sea

saw the land his people had come from
land of figs and olive trees
what should've been his *phalesteen*

...

he'd prove them wrong
his warm human blood would
fertilize the soil of *phalesteen*

his heart transcending his body
he vowed to return to phalesteen
bil rob *bil dem*
with his life with his blood²⁵

²⁴ Hammad was born in Jordan to Palestinian refugees. She moved to New York with her family when she was a child. Hammad performs spoken-word poetry and has published the following books of poetry: *Born Palestinian, Born Black* (New York: UpSet Press, 2010; originally published by Harlem River Press in 1996), *Breaking Poems* (New York: Cypher Books, 2008), and *Zaatar Diva* (New York: Cypher Books, 2005).

²⁵ Suheir Hammad, "dedication", in *Born Palestinian, Born Black*, 21.

Though there appears here to be an echo of the ‘heroic’ type of early Palestinian poetry, Hammad’s code-switching generates a different kind of agency that speaks ‘to’ and ‘from’ Palestine, ‘in’ and ‘of’ an elsewhere. The Arabic words, the transliteration, and the italics underline that the real matter of this poem is distance, and that English and Arabic are articulating the dialogic terms of the poet’s contemporary Palestinian identity. Linguistic and cultural overlappings produce, once again, an engagement with multi-vocal agency. Both Handal and Hammad, then, expand and disseminate Palestinian identity through a specific and contemporary drive, which becomes a panethnic narrative of a transnational exilic condition.

This drive towards what seems a post-national character of Handal’s and Hammad’s poetry cannot, however, be taken as direct and incontestable evidence that Palestinian identity has become disengaged with the theme of the return to the negated land. Given the dramatic events of the past two decades in Gaza, in the West Bank and Israel, Julianne Hammer argues that,

while the future does not look bright for the Palestinians at home and in the diaspora, the difficult situation may breed a new generation of Palestinians who will not dissolve into post-national, postmodern identities before achieving justice and a homeland to which to return.²⁶

The need to return strongly persists in the poetry of the Palestinian diaspora. Handal herself devotes much of her poetry to the necessity of going back, and to the longing for the land. In “Haifa, Haifa”, included in the first section of *The Lives of Rain*, she underscores the themes of leaving and returning:

We were from the East
and then we escaped
left the coast
broken walls
dusty roads
nightmares

...

The lemon trees keep disappearing
and the weather keeps changing,
we keep ageing
keep coming back
but never on time
to see those who keep leaving.²⁷

The continuous and untimely return records the strain to keep a diasporic community together, when death and displacement keep intervening. However, in the same section of Handal’s collection, the poem titled “I Never Made it to Café Beirut; Nor, I Heard, Did You” brings in an interference: not only a romantic

²⁶ Hammer, *Palestinians Born in Exile*, ix. The dramatic situation in the Palestinian territories and in Israel further escalated after the publication of Hammer’s book, culminating with the war on Gaza waged by the Israeli government in 2005.

²⁷ Handal, “Haifa, Haifa”, in *Lives of Rain*, 23.

(albeit evidently tragic) *rendez-vous* is at stake, but an unexpected symbolic world is brought into the deadliness of war-stricken borders:

You insisted, meet me at the Lebanese border.
Told me to bring my favourite poems
of Baudelaire and Gibran, my dreams
wrapped in my black hair, my questions – ²⁸

²⁸ Handal, “I Never Made it
to Café Beirut; Nor, I Heard,
Did You”, in *ibid.*, 25.

Again here, though not as strongly as in “El Almuerzo de Tia Habiba”, maps of signification are juxtaposed, and Baudelaire finds space in the terror of the Lebanese border. Though, as Hammer writes, justice and the homeland are still fundamental issues in the construction of Palestinian identity, the disrupting character of contemporary Palestinian poetry of the diaspora lies in holding within oneself the lost land throughout exile, in a sort of dissemination of Palestinian identity. It is not yet a post-national identity; rather, as already underlined, through the dissemination of the sense of injustice and exile, the Palestinian question ‘enters’ the rest of the world, becoming a critical terrain that exposes the paradoxes and the contradictions of modern nations and of their narrations.

Furthermore, with regards to the specific issue of the ‘post-national’ tension, which is detectable in the poetry of the contemporary Palestinian diaspora, a shift in perspective can be useful, not so much in looking at the possibility of ‘post-nationality’ but, rather, at what Keith Feldman calls a “simultaneous critique and transvaluation of the nation form”.²⁹ Feldman refers specifically to the Arab American context, in which the literary and artistic production has long been engaged in a “counternational concern ... with the establishment of the State of Israel and the present-day deferral of statehood for Palestine”.³⁰ It seems possible to detect a further development of this critique and transvaluation of the nation form, considering the contradictions implicit in the Palestinian question in relation to the claim to nationhood, and in the connections of the modern form of nation-state with the logic of imperialism, and the politics of exclusion and othering which – at least, partly – shape the very question of Palestinian statehood. From this perspective, the dissemination that the Palestinian discourse experiences in the poetics of Handal, Hammad, and others, is inscribed inside a wider set of relations of power underwriting imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism. As a result, we have what can be termed, with Keith Feldman, “a theory of counternational solidarity through the transvaluation of national belonging”.³¹

In “Amrika”, the third part of *The Lives of Rain*, Handal clearly thematizes the dissemination of Palestinian identity in exile; the section of “Amrika”, titled “The Tyranny of Distance” reads:

From Jaffa to Marseille:
How does one begin to understand the difference
between *Sabah el khayr* and *bonjour*,
the difference between the city of lights and black-outs.

²⁹ Keith Feldman, “Poetic
Geographies: Interracial
Insurgency in Arab American
Autobiographical Spaces”,
in Nawar Al-Hassan Golley,
ed., *Arab Women’s Lives Retold.
Exploring Identity Through
Writing* (Syracuse: Syracuse
University Press, 2007), 52.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 70.

C'est comme cela, tout change, habibti,
but our names stay the same,
our eyes remain, our memory.

I sing Inshallah in French as I walk les banlieue Parisienne,
walk through Barbes, Bercy, St. Denis, Rue Bad-el-Oued
uncertain, looking for what I am most certain of.³²

³² Handal, "Amrika", in *Lives of Rain*, 58.

Handal explores Palestinian diasporic identity while conducting an introspective investigation of her own personal movements and unavoidable translations. The section of the same poem under the title "Openings" proceeds in the journey:

New England
quiet echoes raindrops autumn leaves
an alley of tiny butterflies
the difference between where we are from
and where we now live.

The years behind a broken door
My father's grief –
I understand nothing –
Only later do I hear the Arabic
in his footsteps...

I walk through Fenway Park, through
streets with names that escape me,
their stories of sea
their cries for a stranger's grief.
I understand – no one can bear partings...³³

³³ Ibid., 60-61.

The last section of the poem "Debke in New York"³⁴ brings the reader to New York City:

³⁴ *Debke* is an Arabic folkloric dance.

I wear my jeans, tennis shoes,
walk Broadway, pass Columbia,
read Said and Twain,
wonder why we are obsessed
with difference,
our need to change the other?
I wait for the noise to stop
but it never does
so I go to the tip of the Hudson River
recite a verse by Ibn Arabi
and between subway rides,
to that place that I now call home,
listen to Abdel Halim and Nina Simone
hunt for the small things
I have lost inside of myself –
and at the corner of Bleeker and Mercer

through a window with faded Arabic letters
see a New York *debke*...

It is later than it was a while ago
and I haven't moved a bit,
my voices still breaking into tiny pieces
when I introduce myself to someone new
and imagine I have found my way home.³⁵

³⁵ Ibid., 64.

The poem and the book both end with the word 'home', being associated to imagination ("I imagine I have found my way home"). This home is not imagined in a place, but in a person: "someone new". Once again, also and especially in New York, Handal is carrying within herself a non-place of belonging, or the impossibility of belonging.

Ghurba disseminated

In *The Lives of Rain*, Handal writes of Palestinian refugees, and also of the victims of the Balkan wars, of the poor and destitute in Haiti, and of the displaced migrants in the U.S., exploring what in Arabic is called *ghurba*: the separation and estrangement from home and, at the same time, a meaningful belonging. The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic defines *ghurba* as "absence from the homeland; separation from one's native country, banishment, exile; life, or place, away from home".³⁶ The journalist Ghada Al Atrash Janbey notes that

the word *ghurba* also carries an intense feeling along with it, a melancholic feeling of longing, of nostalgia, of homesickness and separation, of a severe patriotic yearning for a place where one's heart was not only living, but also dancing to the beat of a father's or a mother's voice, to the words in grandmother's tale, to a melody from a native instrument, to the pounding of feet stamping in a group dance, to a merchant's voice shouting out the name of his merchandise in the streets of neighborhoods, or simply, to a place where one's heart danced to the silence of a homeland's soil.³⁷

The word *ghurba* derives from the three roots *gha-ra-ba*, which indicate the sun setting, or something that declines. The same roots of *ghurba* make up the word for the West (*al-gharb*: the place where the sun sets) and also, meaningfully, distance, foreignness, or expulsion. The word is also used with the specific meaning of 'diaspora', as Hammer and Lindholm Schulz explain in a survey of the Arabic terms used in relation to the semantic sphere of exile and diaspora:

One ... term is '*al-shataf*', which means to be dispersed, scattered or separated. It might well be an adaptation of the English term 'diaspora', literally meaning 'to be scattered, dispersed, separated'. Clearly the Greek notion of being scattered and separated from the homeland or parent is semantically present here. The Arabic term much longer in use and more emotionally charged is '*al-ghurba*'. ... '*Manfa*' is exile in a more literal sense, as the verb '*nafa*' means 'to banish' or 'expel'. In Palestinian literature and poetry it is '*al-ghurba*', where the Palestinian is a stranger, that carries all the notions of suffering, cold, winter, estrangement and dislocation.³⁸

³⁶ Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Arabic (Arabic/English)*, ed. by J. Milton Cowan, 4th edition (Urbana: Spoken Language Services, 1994).

³⁷ Ghada Al Atrash Janbey, "Meaning Within Words", *Cranbrook Daily Townsman*, May 15, 2009, <http://meaningwithinwords.com/?p=40>, 20 May 2013.

³⁸ Hammer, *Palestinians Born in Exile*, 60.

The American-based novelist of Palestinian descent, Susan Abulhawa, titled a chapter of her 2010 novel *Mornings in Jenin*, “El Ghurba”.³⁹ The novel narrates the tragedy and the search for recovery of a Palestinian family, spanning four generations and a number of countries through which the family itself, and, collectively, the Palestinians, are scattered starting from 1948. The chapter entitled “El Ghurba” begins with Amal, the main narrator of the novel who, still a teenager, orphaned and injured in the 1967 war, moves to the United States. She recalls the estrangement in the following terms:

Feelings of inadequacy marked my first months in America. I floundered in that open-minded world, trying to fit in. But my foreignness showed in my brown skin and accent. Statelessness clung to me like a bad perfume and the airplane hijackings of the seventies trailed my Arabic surname.⁴⁰

Later in the same chapter, Amal (soon to re-name herself Amy) reflects on the distance between herself and her new housemates:

The divide could not have been greater, nor could it be bridged. That’s how it was. Palestine would just rise up from my bones into the center of my new life, unannounced. In class, at a bar, strolling through the city. Without warning, the weeping willows of Rittenhouse Square would turn into Jenin’s fig trees reaching down to offer me their fruit. It was a persistent pull, living in the cells of my body, calling me to myself. Then it would slouch back into latency.⁴¹

Abulhawa brings Palestine into the fluidity of the diaspora; it is not only the past – and the land – pulling ‘back’ towards an unrecoverable life, but also the present that becomes ‘contaminated’ with the lost land. This ‘interference’ of Palestine, inside a diasporic elsewhere, echoes in Suheir Hammad’s poetry; in particular, in her poem “argela remembrance”:⁴²

we read futures in search of our past
in coffee grinds and tea leaves
in upturned hands grasping
for prayer

we are a people
name our sons after prophets
daughters after midwives
eat with upturned hands
plant plastic potted plants
in suffocating apartments
tiny brooklyn style
in memory of the soil once
laid under our nails.⁴³

Here Palestinian identity is disseminated in a trans-national cartography in which the plants are planted in plastic pots, in tiny Brooklyn apartments. Palestine is shown to be (also) outside its land, and the soil itself is carried outside and re-narrated in

³⁹ Susan Abulhawa was born to refugees of the Six-Day War of 1967. She grew up in Kuwait, in Jordan and in occupied East Jerusalem before moving to the United States. She studied Biomedical Science at the University of South Carolina and established a career in medical science. She began writing op-ed pieces for newspapers in the US, while founding Playgrounds for Palestine, an NGO dedicated to upholding the Right to Play for Palestinian children living under occupation. *Mornings in Jenin* is her first novel, originally published in 2006 as *The Scar of David*. Abulhawa titles most of the chapters in her novel with Arabic names, all translated in subtitles; “El Ghurba” is translated as “state of being a stranger”.

⁴⁰ Abulhawa, *Mornings in Jenin* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 169.

⁴¹ Ibid., 175.

⁴² “Argela” is used to indicate the water-pipe commonly smoked in the Middle East. The opening lines of the poem read: “smoking the water pipe / pass the argela / head tipped down / to my father...”, (“argela remembrance”, in *Born Palestinian, Born Black*, 38).

⁴³ Ibid.

new communal locations of identity. As Carol Fadda-Conrey observes,

Hammad grounds the autobiography of a Palestinian American community within a very tactile and tangible exilic setting, which in its every aspect becomes the antithesis of a lost Palestine that permeates the poem but is never named or described. ... The positive cohesiveness of the 'we', however, is outweighed by the shock of dispossession....⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Carol Fadda-Conrey, "Weaving Poetic Autobiographies", in Nawar Al-Hassan Golley, ed., *Arab Women's Lives Retold. Exploring Identity through Writing* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007), 170.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 172.

⁴⁶ Abulhawa, *Mornings in Jenin*, 175.

Furthermore, the soil in the "plastic potted plants" becomes "a synecdoche of Palestinian tilled farmland".⁴⁵ *Ghurba* – foreignness, belonging, and un-belonging – appears in scattered instances in the poetics of the contemporary Palestinian diaspora, unexpectedly rising up, as Abulhawa writes, "from the bones".⁴⁶ Both through the use of polyglossia and the continuous interference of different and overlapping systems of signification, poets such as Handal and Hammad expand the concept of *ghurba* beyond the paradoxical borders of the 'non-nation' of Palestine to a cosmopolitan community of voices encompassing at once estrangement, foreignness and belonging.

The authors of the latest generation of the Palestinian diaspora here analysed are women. Explorations of exile and diaspora abound in male authors as well; however, the poetics of dismemberment, dissemination, and linguistic juxtaposition in relation to the tropes of 'home' and 'belonging' gain a theoretically relevant significance precisely because they are addressed mainly by women artists. This may be perhaps linked to the persistent and (trans-)cultural construction of womanhood as intrinsically symbolizing the home, possibly the homeland, the fertile land bearing progeny.



Fig. 2: Mai Ghoussoub and Souheil Sleiman, *Displaces* (details), 1998, photograph taken from Fran Lloyd, ed., *Contemporary Arab Women's Art: Dialogues of the Present* (London: Women's Art Library, 2002)



Fig. 3: Mai Ghoussoub and Souheil Sleiman, *Displaces* (details), 1998, photograph taken from Fran Lloyd, ed., *Contemporary Arab Women's Art: Dialogues of the Present* (London: Women's Art Library, 2002)

The 1998 installation exhibited at the Shoreditch Town Hall in London by Mai Ghoussoub and Souheil Sleiman entitled *Displaces* already addressed the construction of home and belonging, literally de-constructing the structure of homeliness: three rooms were filled with plaster objects (normally used to build houses), which were piled and scattered on the floor.⁴⁷

In Shaheen Merali's words, the installation could be described as "an evocation of the experience of unbelonging".⁴⁸ The three rooms, full of 'pieces' of a house, described and, at the same time, displaced the vision of 'home' as belonging, commonality and rooted identity. The construction material was not assembled in an intelligible form, thus articulating a resistance to definitions and, at the same time, a disorientation in the face of complete fragmentation and dispersion. Linking the themes of home and domesticity to womanhood and to its construction in terms of "symbolic keeper of the home, or the domestic space", Ghoussoub's and Sleiman's work could be read as a resistance to definitions of domesticity and also to the discourse of womanhood in relation to the home/land, both within the Arab-Muslim world and in the West. According to Fran Lloyd, the three rooms "both contain and challenge assumptions about what signifies home or belonging and resist any fixing of identity by gender, race or sexuality".⁴⁹ The plaster fragments of home, scattered in Ghoussoub's and Sleiman's work of art, spell out the disorientation of un-belonging. Each plaster piece is a letter of an alphabet that finds no linearity, no familiar sequence of symbols, to narrate the scattering of exile. There is only the imperative of uprootedness: the home is in pieces, moving is necessary, *waiting is forbidden*.

⁴⁷ Mai Ghoussoub was born in Beirut in 1952 and died in London in 2007; she was a writer, an artist, a human rights activist, and the co-founder of "Saqi" bookshop and publishing company. Her books include *Leaving Beirut: Women and the Wars Within* (London: Saqi, 2001) and (co-edited with Emma Sinclair-Webb) *Imagined Masculinities: Male Identity and Culture in the Modern Middle East* (London: Saqi, 2006). Souheil Sleiman is a London-based Lebanese artist; his works have been exhibited in Europe and the Arab world, and consist of socially and politically informed sculptures and installations.

⁴⁸ Shaheen Merali, "The Topology of Unbelonging", in *Displaces*, 10-20 July, 1997, exhibition leaflet, unpaginated.

⁴⁹ Fran Lloyd, *Contemporary Arab Women's Art: Dialogues of the Present* (London: Women's Art Library, 2002), 180-181.

Artist's Statement

The poems “Poems of Struggle and Exile”, read during the “ANC between home and exile” conference organized in Naples, 19-20 November, 2012, are from the collection in progress *Souls: Poems of a Transitional Era* (working title), which will be probably divided into two parts focusing on home and exile: “Here and Then” / “There and Then”.

The poems are set in the period between 1984 and 1994, which saw an estimated 20,500 people killed at the hands of the state-backed Third Force. 12,000 were killed in Natal province alone (see Anthea Jeffrey, *People's War: New Light on the Struggle for South Africa*, Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2010, and *The Natal Story: 16 Years of Conflict*, Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1997).

An earlier version of “Who Will Wash My Feet?” appeared in Phillippa Yaa de Villiers, Isabel Ferrin-Aguirre and Xiao Kaiyu, eds., *No Serenity Here: An Anthology of African Poetry in Amharic, English, French, Arabic and Portuguese* (Beijing: World Knowledge Publishers, 2010), 74. Otherwise all five poems appear here for the first time.

Poems of Struggle and Exile

Sleep runners

How can we forget when we run in our sleep?
Stones in one hand, a wet cloth in the other, we run
Facing the mellow yellows, sometimes hordes of men
with spears in one hand, shields in the other, coming.

How can we forget when, years later, we still run in our sleep?
Away from the meeting line, back to where we came, hearts pumping
amongst other running bodies – comrades in flight – feet thumping
wet cloths on our eyes, bodies falling left, right, in front, while running.

They have the luxury of forgetting but not us, the sleep runners
who run back to the fallen bodies; feeling for pulses, tearing off clothing,
using it
to stop the bleeding, turning over bodies to shut eyes and straighten
limbs.
We can't help noticing our teardrops and sweat falling on still bodies.
Then again, we run.

Our truth comes through in our sleep. It keeps us running
to call community members, to help carry the many fallen bodies
before the men in the yellow vans or those with spears and shields return.
How can we forget when being on the run has become the natural rhythm
of our sleep?

¹ The title was inspired by
Langston Hughes's poem
"The Negro Speaks of
Rivers", first published in
1921 in *The Crisis*.

The river speaks of ashes¹

I have known corpses:
whole and intact
wounded and mutilated.

I propelled them to the bank
for their relatives to find and claim.

I have known ashes:
of burnt corpses
bagged and unrecognizable.

I listened when they spoke
I memorized their names:
Champion Galela
Qaqawuli Godolozzi
Sipho Hashe²

² On 8 May 1985, Port
Elizabeth Black Civic
Organisation (PEBCO)
activists Galela, Godolozzi and
Hashe (later referred to as the
PEBCO Three) were abducted
from an airport in Port
Elizabeth. In 1997, during
the Truth and Reconciliation
Commission hearings, a
Security Police Officer,
Colonel Gideon Nieuwoudt,
confessed to killing them,
burning their bodies and
throwing them into
the Fish River.

I have known corpses, and I have known ashes
My name is Nxuba, those who arrived and never left renamed me Fish.

After the massacre

After the bodies had been identified counted and taken away
After the police had come and gone, the neighbours stuck around
Four women walked the familiar path in a line, paraffin lamps in their hands
The stars listened to their now hushed cries, watched them wipe away silent tears
Mechanically they filled their water buckets from the homestead tank
Back in the house, taking rags and soap from the cupboards, they started cleaning:
First, sweeping shards of glass scattered in every room, then
Wiping splashes of blood on walls and broken windows,
smeared across furniture, doors, sometimes even spotting the ceiling.
In the kitchen, they removed pieces of the brain tissue splattered in all directions
When they went on their knees to clean the floors
cupping congealed blood in their hands – they told the girls
to look away and sent them to comfort younger children and put them to bed.
They put in a bowl all cartridges and bullets they found.
In the bedrooms, they stripped the blood stained bedcovers and curtains
soaked everything in a large zinc tub for washing the next day.
They went into each room and repositioned everything
So that it looked almost exactly as it did before the massacre.
By sunrise the women had restored the homestead
Bodies identified, counted and taken away live with them, years later.

About the ambulance

They had us all fooled
about the ambulance
We never imagined
Never suspected
We prayed for the injured
We wept for the dead
While they smiled in victory
as the weapons left the scene
under the cover
of the ambulance

Digging for freedom

This young man says he and his friends refuse to come and work with us
even though they know we can no longer cope with digging; day and
night.

He and his friends agree that we, gravediggers, must take a stand
and refuse to dig graves for our people dying all the time.
Then, we too, would be making a statement; about this unnecessary war
of girls and women raped, of playing children dying in the crossfire
of families fleeing homes, of brother against brother.
This young man says no freedom can come out of so much bloodshed
and mayhem.

This young man doesn't know that we are women disguised as men
We started digging graves three months ago when so many men were
dying
children were fleeing their homes, simply disappearing
He doesn't know that when we send him away to sleep at sunset,
we start another mission of hiding women and children in these graves
so they can at least get some sleep and feed their infants in peace.
This young man doesn't know that to an army of women gravediggers
freedom is taking an energizing nap, on the other side of this hill.

³ An earlier version of this poem appeared in Phillippa Yaa de Villiers, Isabel Ferrin-Guirre and Xiao Kaiyu, eds., *No Serenity Here: An Anthology of African Poetry in Amharic, English, French, Arabic and Portuguese* (Beijing: World Knowledge Publishers, 2010), 74.

⁴ This refers to the unbanning of liberation movements by the then Apartheid government President F. W. de Klerk on 2 February 1990.

Who will wash my feet?³

Who will wash my feet?
My tears dried before 1990⁴
My thirst is unknown to the world
My hunger is not for food
My wounds are hidden inside
My womb weeps silences
My nipples watch the soil
to safeguard those
who travelled through me
My memories run in my veins
My cracked, dry feet
have never touched a shoe
or the floor of any office
but I also deserve the courtesy
of someone washing my feet.

George Orwell and I. An Article*
(March, 1994)

* © Sharmush Parsipur.
Courtesy of the author.

Reflecting on the previous year, I see myself immersed in the world of Orwell's *1984*, sitting on a chair, staring straight ahead, thinking that this book should be presented to our offspring in the Twenty-First Century as "the end result of humanity's endeavors". I ponder about the size of the smallest camera in the world and, finally, I happened to see it on TV, "smaller than a fingertip!" I spent endless hours of very lengthy days during the past year, debating with myself whether or not technology is already advanced enough to control the human mind from a distance, whether it can produce thoughts? Shortly before the beginning of the new year I started hearing voices in my head, voices that drove me to the brink of lunacy. But I am back. And I am the child of the age of the science. Hence, I can't attribute these voices to the supernatural. I'd rather find a scientific explanation for them. But it does occasionally occur to me that I might be mad. Then I recall the fatigued and aged figure of my adolescent idol, Fidel Castro. The older and the more exhausted he looks, the more I give into the obsession of making a fortune. "How I have advanced in life!", the dollar keeps rising and I keep sinking in my poverty! Computers keep getting faster, and I begin to resemble a dinosaur!

My resemblance to dinosaurs increases day by day. My mind is not capable of following the latest scientific advance, and I feel more indifferent by the moment. On top of that, I wake up every morning with a dried and swollen throat because of the air pollution. I have to live by the cold-hearted and horrendous laws of the land and the fear of being watched and followed. I suspect everything and everyone.

It was during the past year that I realized that the powerful trend of modern fiction writing in my country – which was my way of life too – has struck a rocky and bumpy stretch. Now I am sitting here, exhausted and enervated, and am not able to fit its pieces together. I feel worn out. I read some recent releases, mainly works of fiction, and realize that the age of innocent, gray, unexciting, and content-free stories has begun. It's as if they have put a veil on every thought. Everything is covered and manacled. Nothing is expressed; and nothing can be expressed. It seems that one is allowed to move one's lips, but, like a fish, one is expected to generate no sound.

Sometimes I walk on our apartment balcony facing the landlord's backyard, but my mother yells at me to go inside. There's a possibility that, from an oblique angle, from some distant point out on the street, I could be observed without my chador; I, who for the sake of preserving a semblance of personal freedom, have chosen a life of seclusion at home.

Then, with sadness I remember a recent wedding celebration in Tehran. The couple had searched for four months for a little place to hold the ceremony without

having to follow Islamic codes of dress and conduct. Secluded houses, where they would not be harassed, are expensive and difficult to come by, but they managed to secure a place. On the eve of the wedding, some individuals knocked on the door at 6 p.m. and did not leave until they were paid. At 8 p.m., the frightened host reported the sighting of a suspicious group of people on the street. The wedding party lost its warmth and tranquility, and the guests began counting seconds until the end of the ceremony so that they could slip away from 'joy and celebration' under the umbrella of 'fear and persecution'. But, to show respect to the bride and the groom, they stayed on patiently. By 11 p.m. when most of the guests had already left, the doorbell was rung again. It was a new group of intruders, and they left after they were properly paid. The celebration ended then.

And the other day a young female doctor was telling me that she had filled out forms to immigrate to Canada once she finished her internship in a hospital in a remote town. She said that she spends her entire day at work and stays in her room afterwards, fearing harassment out on the street.

But I am still sitting on the couch and thinking about miniature cameras and long-distance thought-control processes. I realize that the world today is far more unpleasant and ugly than Orwell's rendition in *1984*. On the one hand, I am bound by laws belonging to centuries past and, on the other, I am surrounded by tools and technology bridging the present with the future. It occurs to me that in the age of satellites and the possibility of invoking thoughts through electromagnetic radiation, one could not rule a society with ancient, web-like, and entrapping laws. The combination of the ancient and the futuristic elements exhausts one's soul profoundly. One cannot behave in public in a way different from the way one acts in private. The frequency of deceit by those who govern is so high that the truth gets further shrouded every moment. And a literature cannot be born under such conditions. The value of literature is delineated by the authentic psychology, sociology, history, and geography of the nation.

How could one proclaim that the present misery of one woman is the outcome of the marriage at the age of twelve to a man twenty years her senior? How could one see this and say nothing? How could one report that the emigration of that physician was caused by her dreaming of some very minor freedoms? How could one know this and say nothing? How could one discuss the 'fact' that there's a saturation point to the application of 'deceit', and that beyond that people will conduct their affairs through assuming 'another' route? Is one allowed to report that during the past year some individuals sought 'spiritual strength' by searching in the depth of historical tradition? And what happens if we do not speak up? For example, what if we do not report that a dangerously large section of the population is using tranquilizers? Or what if we do not argue that when fear and persecution surpass a certain limit, people enter a world of 'fantasy' – and it is always from 'fantasy' that unpredictable events arise? Why shouldn't we report that the rate of suicide amongst women has risen tremendously, and that they often commit self-immolation? Why shouldn't we inform that the killing of husbands has increased

recently? Don't we realize that each of these phenomena is a sign of critical and dangerous times? Shouldn't literature discuss such things? Then why is it that our literature is full of meaningless pseudo-philosophical works of fiction? That is how I and Orwell's book co-habitate and reach the end of the year.

But right now the cat in the courtyard is staring at me with its green eyes, and the pomegranate tree is whispering to me that it soon will be floating in blossoms. The sky is still blue, and I am slowly ridding myself of my year-long mental exhaustion. Hence, for the new year, I propose to the publisher of *1984*, to run a large number of copies of the book and mail a good many of them to certain individuals along with a cover letter saying, "This book was written in 1974 or 1948 and has predicted the Soviet Union's crash in 1984 – which actually took place in 1990. It also concerns itself with conditions of the premature growth of technology and it does not display any awareness that its predictions would actually come true".

At this Persian New Year (1373 A.H.), as an independent observer, I would like to express that after a lengthy struggle in the lower wastelands of sorrow and despair, I find myself healthy, slightly jovial, and prepared to write about fears, anxieties, emotional failures and thoughts hidden in the depth of the mind. As a novelist, I can concentrate on the concept of emigration, and I can search for spiritual values too – provided that I would not be overwhelmed by the fear of persecution, a forced dress code, and that I would not be collapsing under the lashes of the morality and mentality of the dark ages. I announce that at this frightening and prosperous age of the advancement of computers, not much time is left for reform and improvement. This time, if a nation loses in the game of progress, it will have lost forever. I suggest a frank summation of all the values of Iranian culture and an evaluation of the percentage of the sum that we can take with us to the upcoming century. And, once and for all, we should concern ourselves with the fact that, "when we reduce people to cockroaches, don't we ourselves, gradually, become cockroaches too?"

Translated from the Persian
by Steve MacDowell & Afshin Nassiri
1994

Tales of Transit: 'Crossing' in Andrea Levy,
Roshini Kempadoo and Julie Otsuka

Today the word 'diaspora' has widened its semantic scope: traditionally used to refer to the Jewish experience, it is now employed to address the experiences of many other people and communities. If Robin Cohen uses the expression "cultural diaspora" to refer to all the migratory phenomena of the late modernity, James Clifford, in his "Diasporas", emphasizes the variety and the extent of contemporary migrations, defining the twentieth century as a preeminently diasporic time. According to Clifford, this century is characterized by "dwelling in displacement", the experience of relentless 'crossing' commonly shared by ethnic and cultural communities today.¹

¹ Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008 [1997]), 128; James Clifford, "Diasporas", *Cultural Anthropology*, 9.3, 1994.

Being displaced is one of the most difficult experiences of one's life, but it can, at the same time, offer new and other ways of knowledge. Organized on a transnational level, migration connects people, places and cultures; it disrupts hierarchies between center and periphery; it creates a variety of personal re-renderings of the shared uprootedness; it offers the chance to re-write the official versions of history by revealing the presence of intentionally forgotten pasts and of deliberately denied subjectivities. It is this last opportunity that propels my reading of the contemporary diaspora as it is re-written by some writers who have lived and shared the experience of dwelling in displacement. These authors witness the difficulties of diasporic life; at the same time, by working on the official discourses of history and the canonical practices of the Western archive, they are determinate to vindicate the subjectivities of their lives and of the experiences of their characters. Through their predicament of living in a displaced present, having personally experienced the pains and, at the same time, the gifts of the migratory condition, they discover new legacies and other forms of future.

Specifically, my paper reads the (present, past and future) experiences of migration through the narrative of Andrea Levy, according to the digital art of Roshini Kempadoo, and in the hybrid writing of Julie Otsuka. These writers inscribe their experiences of diasporic crossing in the very dwelling of their creative works. Reluctant to be constrained by any borders, even those set by the discipline of art, they cross writing through technology, in order to reach it back, improved and changed by the difference of their passages. Signing different poetics of relentless movements, urgencies and crossings, Levy's 'watery words', Roshini's 'live images' and Otsuka's 'chorus of voices' narrate the intense female 'tales of transit' from distant shores, different temporalities and other geographies, looking at the past and hoping in the future-*to-come*.

The 'Small Island/s' of Andrea Levy

As a daughter of the diaspora from the Caribbean to Great Britain during the 1950s, Andrea Levy writes novels that bear witness to the experiences of the black

migration. In her works, she is attentive to all forms of racism experienced by the migrants – from social, political and cultural displacement to the painful and everyday difficulties in past and present integration. Her writing is, first of all, a form of autobiographical writing. Born and raised in London, Levy belongs to ‘Englishness’ in a way that is reminiscent of the *incipit* of Hanif Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), which reads: “My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories.”²

Indeed, if Kureishi’s introduction emphasizes the birth of a new genre, a breed which is produced at the crossing of two waters, in Andrea Levy’s writing, the seawater surrounding Jamaica and the British ‘Mother Country’ hints at a birth, which is almost impossible to deliver, especially for a writer needing a tradition and a literary legacy – two elements that are so strikingly missing in contemporary black British fiction. Levy knows that her diasporic generation has attracted little creative attention; it is a void that, she feels, must be occupied by a genre that bears witness to the experiences of both those who took upon themselves the colonial migration in Britain, and of those who, being English by birthright, nonetheless belong to what is called “new ethnicity”.³ In her practice, this genre is specifically inflected into the gendered voices of the women who have survived the ‘crossing’ by living suspended in the space between two stories, two worlds, two islands and two cultures.

Levy herself belongs to the second generation of British immigrants, directing her double perspective to a unique story: as she maintains, “every good writer is really only telling one story”.⁴ The story she tells finds hospitality in *Every Light in the House Burnin’* (1994), *Never Far From Nowhere* (1996), *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999), *Small Island* (2004), and the recent *The Long Song* (2010). These novels seem to be complex variations of the same theme: the life of black people, especially women, in Great Britain. The starting point is always London, the city where life is marked by racism and prejudice. The story, then, continues with Levy plunging into her personal memory, thus facing the (often forgotten) past of the Jamaican people under the British Empire, in order to delve deeply into the collective psyche of her diasporic community. What is singular to this intertwined narration is that the analysis of the harshness of the English society goes hand in hand with the emergence of Levy’s literary agency and personal point of view. After having acquired her analytic frame, she is ready to approach the knot of her writing: the voyage from the Caribbean to the Mother Country, the crossing of the Atlantic towards the center of the Empire, and the consequent notion of ‘liquidity’, so strongly marked in British black history.

Small Island is the novel that best articulates this historical and cultural experience, relating the story of Gilbert Joseph and Hortense Robert, who migrate from Jamaica to England in search of a better life. Once in London, the couple finds a room in the flat of Queenie Bligh, an English woman who accepts Jamaican lodgers while waiting for the return of her racist husband Bernard, who is lost at

² Hanif Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* (Great Britain: Faber and Faber, 1999), 1.

³ See Stuart Hall, “New Ethnicities”, in Kobena Mercer, ed., *Black Film, British Cinema*, ICA Documents 7 (London: Institute of Art, 1989).

⁴ Andrea Levy, “The Empire’s Child”, *The Guardian* (Saturday, January 31, 2004), 10 March 2012.

war. When the man unexpectedly comes back and discovers the black boarders, his racist fury explodes.

The plot of *Small Island* reads like a story of interracial conflict; in fact, Levy opens up a whole new setting for her creative interest. In truth, her story covers the crossing of three important nuclei of attention: the passage from myth to reality, the movement from matter to metaphor, the transit of time and space. Initially, the adjective ‘small’ of the title *Small Island* seems to refer to Jamaica, one of the biggest islands in the Caribbean, but smaller than the ‘Mother Country’ both in geographical terms and in terms of the lack of economic opportunities. England, differently, seems to be the place of endless chances.⁵ Gilbert’s decision to leave Jamaica is the outcome of the myth of the British motherland with its golden leaves – an image that can only fuel his imagination and aspiration:

... his voice ... described how in England the trees lose their leaves before the winter months. Every leaf on every tree turns first red and then golden. With the wind or the passing of time these dazzling leaves fall from the trees covering the parks, the gardens, the pavements with a blanket of gold (94).

⁵ As Hortense remembers, Gilbert would often compare England and Jamaica: “He told me opportunity ripened in England as abundant as fruit on Jamaican trees. And he was going to be the man who pluck it”. Andrea Levy, *Small Island* (London: Headline Review, 2004), 98; hereafter in the text.

The Jamaican immigrants think of themselves as British subjects, and, consequently, dream of their future in England in sheer hope. Little by little, however, the novel explains that the ‘small island’ refers to Great Britain, which represents a hostile society capable of shattering expectations, and which offers little or no opportunities at all. This is the general crossing, the circle of attention that Levy inscribes in the writing of her novel, soon to be followed by the crossing or the passage from matter to metaphor, presented through the **natural images that connect** the two small islands.

Levy sets some elementary images at the core of her narration, not as mere digressions of the main story but as a means to bring into it the essential imagery of liquidity. As in the history of the Caribbean diaspora, ‘crossing’ has necessarily and always occurred through the sea, similarly, *Small Island* constructs its plot through an infinite series of images of water. In Jamaica, these images converge on the hurricane and on its devastating effects over the landscape and its people, thus enabling an exploration of the differences between the native island and the Mother Country. “Hurricanes are phenomena of Caribbean climate, never to occur in England” (248), says Queenie, when, in her elocution lesson, she thinks of English words starting with “H”. Climatic phenomena have a material value as well as a symbolic one in that they influence the world of the island and the lives of the characters. For instance, as the hurricane causes destruction – “the world was upside down” (55), observes Hortense – its physical devastation reflects a fury that belongs to the psyche of the island’s inhabitants. During the storm, Hortense discovers that the man she has always loved, Michael Roberts, has an affair with a married woman; sharing the fury of nature with all the strength in her body, her act of revenge is the crying out of their secret to the community. At the same time,

the hurricane is what causes the Jamaican people to migrate to other parts of the globe, mainly to Great Britain. Here, again, it is the element of climate that brings to the forefront the difference between the ‘small islands’ of Jamaica and Britain, now set in a relation of contrast, rather than analogy. Hortense perceives the effect of the weather on her body as the sign of her leaving one island and approaching the other: “I did not dare to dream that it would one day be I ... who would sail on a ship as big as the world and feel the sun’s heat on my face gradually change from roasting to caressing” (11).

From burning to sweetness: on her setting foot on the soil of the ‘Mother Country’, she is overwhelmed by the environment that feels so different from what she has expected. Britain is, in truth, an icy and snowy land, with an unbearable rigor characterizing its climate, where the sun never shines:

... [b]ut there was no sun – not even a feeblest shadow. How the birds wake in this country and know when to sing? ... ‘It’s too dark’ I said. ‘It is winter. Always dark on winter morning’, he told to me. ... ‘It gets dark early too’, he said, although he was not addressing me but thinking loud. ‘Most of the day dark’ (220).

The character’s encounter with England takes place under the spell of the inclement weather, but it conceals another kind of coldness: the refusal of its society to welcome migrants. To the Jamaicans, Britain appears as a cold and inhospitable place. The expectation of Britain as a lovely mother is therefore turned into an indifferent stepmother, who has no compassion for her sons and daughters coming from elsewhere. Mary Chamberlaine vibrantly describes the double – literal and metaphorical – kind of English coldness: “... for the most part Britain was experienced as hostile, dirty and immoral. Migration was necessarily a disruption to the routine, from the (remembered) warmth and closeness of the Caribbean to the literal and metaphorical coldness of Britain.”⁶

Crossing myth with reality, moving from matter to metaphor, there rests the last ‘crossing’ that radically transforms the novel’s writing: the passage of time into space. In order to tell her story, Levy has thoroughly researched history: Gilbert arrives at Tilbury, England, on the *Windrush Empire*, together with more than five hundred other Jamaicans. It is the 21st June, 1948, the date that Caryl Phillips defines as ‘topic’ in the encounter between the white society and the black immigrant:

Fifty years ago the SS Empire Windrush dropped anchor at Tilbury docks and discharged 492 Jamaicans. It is these individuals, and the quarter of a million who succeeded them, who deserve our acknowledgment, respect and gratitude, for as they stood on the deck of the ship and stared out at the white cliffs of Dover, they carried within their hearts a dream. And like all great pioneers, in the face of much adversity and innumerable obstacles, they remained true to their dream.⁷

Six months later, Hortense joins Gilbert in joy and expectation: “I was leaving Jamaica. Getting on a ship the very next day” (108). After hours spent at the port waiting for him, she reaches Gilbert’s address by taxi. Looking like a woman coming

⁶ Mary Chamberlain, “The Family as Model and Metaphor in Caribbean Migration to Britain”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 2 (1999).

⁷ Caryl Phillips, “The Pioneers: Fifty Years of Caribbean Migration to Britain”, in *A New World Order: Selected Essays* (London: Vintage, 2001), 282.

from a distant island, her body carries the sea air with it, still smelling of the crossing: “Placing her hand on Hortense’s shoulder, [Jean] leans in closer to her, all the while sniffing like she is smelling something. ‘Bloody hell – she’s so fresh off the boat, I can smell the sea’. Hortense still smiling wide-eyed polite then feels Jean’s door shut in her face” (31). The smell of the sea on Hortense’s skin is the sign of her Atlantic crossing. At the same time, after the long journey, her arrival in England takes place at the harbor, the place that, as Alessandro Aresu observes, “may be also thought of as a *door* toward a further voyage ... a station to begin a new questioning”.⁸ In truth, placed at the door of the unknown, the black woman – and the whole generation of women who encountered the land of their origin in these historical conditions – represents a newness, an interruption that dismantles all Western notions of cultural unity. In particular, she is able to question the demagogical Manichean views that rule the relationship between the center and the periphery, the familiar and the foreign, the internal and the external. As Iain Chambers remarks, the migrant is the inscribed blurring of all borders, limits and frontiers: “This dramatic figure is not merely a historical symptom of modernity; she is, rather, the condensed interrogation of the very identity of the modern political subject.”⁹ Hortense personifies the questioning of modern subjectivity, and, even more, she incarnates the interrogation of her own history. Her strategy is the crossing of the historical experience of her people with the inventive weaving of her own life. The result is that she transforms Queenie’s flat, at 21, Nevern Street, into the place where the white and the black communities live together, like a ship in motion where the colonizers and the colonized cannot avoid being inextricably joined:

The image of the ship – a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion – is especially important for historical and theoretical reasons Ships immediately focus attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artefacts: tracts, books, gramophone records, and choirs.¹⁰

The living microcosm (a small place, with a sink, a bed, a table, and two broken chairs) of Hortense’s flat-ship, with its rooms-cabins, becomes the place where untold stories and different cultures converge. In terms of a singular tradition to rely on, this converging is staged by Levy as the crossing that marks the novel’s definite and final acquisition. At first, the perception that Hortense has of her room as made of high and dark walls, seems to evoke the squalor of the new conditions in which she will have to survive:

‘This is the room’, he said. All I saw were dark brown walls. A broken chair that rested one uneven leg on the Holy Bible. A window with torn curtain and Gilbert’s suit ... hanging from a rail on the wall. ... [T]hree steps would take me to one side of this room. Four steps could take me to another. There was a sink in the corner, a rusty tap stuck out from the wall above it. There was a table with two chairs ... pushed up against the bed. The armchair held a shopping bag, a pyjama top, and a teapot. In the fireplace the gas hissed with a blue flame. (20-21)

⁸ Alessandro Aresu, *Filosofia della navigazione* (Milano: Bompiani, 2006), 63 (my translation).

⁹ Iain Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings: The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 7.

¹⁰ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic, Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London and New York: Verso, 1993), 16.

The scene, however, gains its aura when it acknowledges the *trait-d'union* which links the room's characterization to a different time and a different place. Its description cannot but remind the reader of the time and the place narrated by Jamaica Kincaid in *Lucy*, where the protagonist compares the room where she lives to a ship hold, and herself to its cargo:

The room in which I lay was a small room just off the kitchen – the maid's room. ... The ceiling was very high and the walls went all the way up to the ceiling, enclosing the room like a box – a box in which cargo travelling a long way should be shipped. But I was not cargo. I was only an unhappy young woman living in a maid's room, and I was not even the maid.¹¹

¹¹ Jamaica Kincaid, *Lucy* (New York: Farrar Strauss Giroux, 1990), 7.

The Digital *Arrival* by Roshini Kempadoo



Fig.1: Roshini Kempadoo, screen still from *Arrival: Part One*, 2010. Courtesy of the artist.

This installation imagines and reflects recent experiences by African women having travelled by boat from North Africa to Spain across the Mediterranean (2005 – 2010). *Arrival: Part 1* reflects the 'irregular' migratory route taken in *cayucos* (small boats) from North and central West Africa to the Spanish coastland. Persons surviving the journey tell of unprepared and brutal experiences – of desperation, tragedy, hope and determination. The media coverage of sunbathers looking aghast at men, women and children as survivors of the crossing have become familiar to us living in Europe – disguising a more complex and yet continual story of migration and fantasy – the desire and possibility of leading a better life experience. This old migratory route across the Mediterranean has become a recurring visualised trope rehearsed by the popular media and politicians. The visual representation of boat people arriving is construed

as central to the concerns of European citizenship, economic recession, bankruptcy, and potential threat to national security. On each screen an interlinking narrative imagines what could have happened, what we might know about the crossing, and what women might have gone through in making the journey. The work is self-reflexive to provoke an insight into the contradictory and contested effects of economic migration and the impact of the tenuous co-existence between extreme wealth and poverty that perpetuates everyday experiences. The challenge is to give a sense of what continues to take place, whilst acknowledging the limits of a mediated and European orientated point of view. *Arrival: Part 1* is a commentary from a 'situated perspective' offered by Donna Haraway, one that is from a 'limited location and situated knowledge' which 'in this way we might become answerable for what we learn how to see'.

Roshini Kempadoo¹²

¹² Roshini Kempadoo presented *Arrival: Part One* as part of a lecture tour in Canada, Autumn 2010 including the Riddell Lecture 2010 at University of Regina. It was exhibited in Point Sud, Bamako, Mali in February 2011 as part of an international symposium and exhibition entitled *Photography and the Representation of African Migration* (Bamako Project 2011). The artwork was published as an artist's portfolio in the online journal *Hum 736: Papeles de Cultura Contemporánea* 14 (December 2011). See <http://www.ugr.es/~hum736/revista/20electronica/numero14/revista14.htm>. For the Artist's website, see <http://www.roshinikempadoo.co.uk>

¹³ See Deborah Willis, *Roshini Kempadoo Autograph* (London: Autograph, 1997).

¹⁴ Heidi Mirza, "Introduction: Mapping a Genealogy of Black British Feminism", in Heidi Mirza, ed., *Black British Feminism. A Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 3.

The artist, teacher and writer Roshini Kempadoo deals with the legacy of slavery and with themes of immigration and exploitation. Her work can be defined as archival, in that it relies on documented research and personal witnessing that shed a light on the absence of the stories of migration told by women, and on the peculiar silence that covers contemporary black British art. These acts of caesura try to fill the spaces left empty in historiography by giving creative voices to those who have been marginalised by colonial power. Kempadoo, who is determined to incarnate this goal, adopts a multidisciplinary perspective, working on photography, digital installations, and writing at the same time. In crossing these different technologies, she asserts the specificity of her location as a woman, born in Britain from Guyanese parents: "My work is reflective of issues and attitudes that position us as black individuals."¹³

As Adrienne Rich's politics of location suggests, if women want to develop a female, feminine and feminist art that explores new physical, spiritual and emotional spaces, they must recognize their own location – be it the body, the home, the country or the continent. Kempadoo's singular location is to belong to the black British generation in a liminal condition, placed at the crossroad of the conceptual impossibility of being British and black at the same time. As Heidi Mirza claims, the terms are mutually exclusive, if the British identity is founded on racial belonging, inscribed in a hegemonic discourse that excludes all ethnic groups from the perimeter of its white 'purity':

To be black and British is to be unnamed in official discourse. The construction of national British identity is built upon a notion of racial belonging, upon a hegemonic white ethnicity that never speaks its presence. We are told that you can be either one or the other, black or British, but not both.¹⁴

In the spirit of Stuart Hall's theories, to be born in the diaspora pushes black artists to the margins; their creativity – British by birthright, but alien in ethnicity – must struggle to find a place within the British society. How does Kempadoo carry out her own fight? Her artistic education took place in the 1980s, a period which saw an incredible vitality in the arena of visual arts, witnessing the rise of independent cinema and photography also thanks to the activism of Sankofa and the Black Audio Film Collective. Hyphenated artists such as Kempadoo, adamant in opposing the cultural

caesura imposed upon them and with a clear political agenda, were searching for ways of expression that were new and specific to their experiences. Indeed, the media Kempadoo employs are meant to question the dominant regimes of representation, reflecting on the experiences of the black diaspora in Great Britain.

Kempadoo's poetics emerges from the documentary tradition, which she pushed to its limits, so as to distinguish it from all grains of realism and, at the same time, to allow the analysis of the relation between the art of photography and its technology. In her radical re-negotiation of places, identities and stories, the artist exploits the potential of the technological tools at her disposal, creating what she defines as 'photoconstructions', i.e. the counter-images, invented and generated by the computer, that construct a counter-narration of mainstream culture through specific acts of juxtaposition and multiplicity.¹⁵ She deploys these techniques mainly in the arena of visual anthropology, working on the photographic archives that map colonial history. Her critical position is that, if photography is imbued with those racial prejudices that reassert dominant discourses, the ethnographic photos used to classify ethnicities can also be used to show the partiality of the science enforced by British colonialism to assert the biological inferiority of the colonized populations. If, as Maria Fernandez argues, technology is usually associated with ideas of progress, modernity and globality, and rarely with the power and the politics permeating it, in fact, the image is never innocent or transparent, but always complicit with the power and the politics of the West claiming the exclusion and the marginalization of the black experience from official history.¹⁶

¹⁵ Gen Doy, *Black Visual Culture: Modernity and Postmodernity* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 88.

¹⁶ See Maria Fernandez, "Postcolonial Media Theory", *Art Journal*, 58.3, 59-73.



Fig. 2: Roshini Kempadoo, screen still from *Arrival: Part One*, 2010. Courtesy of the artist.

Through her 'photoconstructions', Kempadoo questions issues of exclusion and marginalization. In *ECU. European Currency Unfolds* (1992), a project of ten photos of European banknotes, she replaces the characters printed on the notes with the faces of unknown immigrants, associating Western economy to colonialism, genocide, and exploitation. *Sweetness and Light* (1995) shows that, even if it is often negated, the concept of Englishness relies on the legacy of slavery and the burden of Empire. *Virtual Exiles* (2000) captures the experience of migration in a video and an interactive website, which both call for the contributions of others to make sense of a common diaspora. In *Ghostbing* (2004), the interconnection between the Caribbean and Britain is staged through the construction of an imaginary, 'digital' plantation.

It is, however, her work *Arrival* (2010) that directly deals with the experience of crossing by showing the gendered connections between slavery, colonialism and diaspora.

As Kempadoo explains, her origin greatly influenced this exploration of migration, linking it with the questions of belonging and citizenship in the host country.¹⁷ Her specific topic is the diaspora that is taking place in the Mediterranean today, and that echoes both the 1950s Caribbean immigration to Britain, and, going back in time, the Middle Passage from Africa to the Caribbean. If the movements of African slaves during the colonial period share a strong relevance to the present diaspora, the artist's gaze is directed towards the violence of that past, at the same time remaining open to the conceptualization of a future that might be totally different.¹⁸

The installation, presented at "Photography and the Representation of African Migration" at Point Sud, Bamako, in Mali in February 2011, projects a series of stories on three screens. These stories are told from various viewpoints, in a plurality of vision that is already an embodied trait of its object – the impossibility of analysing diasporas from any single or totalizing perspective. As Nicholas Mirzoeff observes:

There is ... a problem concerning the representation of diasporas. Diaspora cannot by its very nature be fully known, seen or quantified, even – or especially – by its own members. The notion of diaspora and visual culture embodies this paradox. A diaspora cannot be seen in any traditional sense, and it certainly cannot be represented from the viewpoint of one-point perspective.¹⁹

In *Arrival*, this impossibility is rendered through the creation of an 'interpolating installation', that is, by manipulating its images and movements into a critical commentary that resists official history, and which is intended to restore black women's historical dignity.²⁰ The installation's multidisciplinary ensemble of photographs, writings, voices and sounds creates the proper milieu for dismantling the traditional and demagogical representations of migration. Within its general inscription, Kempadoo's image-sequences are presented as a way to suspend time, producing a sense of immobility that partakes with the absence, the loss, and the feelings of transiency experienced by diasporic people. The images are not sequenced in a linear way, but juxtaposed according to a technology of sampling and montage that interrupts the pretence of 'one' narration, materializing on the screens the interstices of

¹⁷ Roshini Kempadoo, *Arrival* (2010).

La représentation de la diaspora black/noire – Migration et Europe, 11, http://www.migrationandmedia.com/dat/Kempadoo_franz.pdf, 11 March 2012.

¹⁸ What seems to interest Kempadoo is the fact that art is often complicit in rendering the 'black body' according to stereotypes that follow the rhetoric of institutions. Her project is meant to challenge and reverse traditional representations of blackness as a monolithic entity, by placing the black body at the centre of her artistic articulation of their emotional and physical visions.

¹⁹ Nicholas Mirzoeff, ed., *The Visual Culture Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 205.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

history, and the spaces left unrecognized by the historical and cultural official notions of reality. The material rendering of the migratory experience is, however, only one part of the project, which, in truth, establishes what Derek Walcott once claimed: if the Caribbean lives a “loss of history”, the only way out of this historical censura is to turn to imagination and to creativity.²¹ Working on *Arrival*, Kempadoo is herself confronted with the emptiness of the official archive of the voyage from North Africa to Europe, personally experiencing the necessity, in order to tell her story, to turn to fantasy and imagination, to the capacity of the image to be evocative. The result is a work that begins by showing on the screens images of water slowly flowing, with the gentle movements of their undulating surfaces. The noise of the waterfall accompanies a line of writing that narrates the fatality of the destiny of the migrating people:

Each year the Association Por Derechos Humanos de Andalucía (Sevilla) reports on those who die whilst immigrating to Southern Spain (*víctimas de la inmigración clandestina en la frontera sur*).

Between 2005 and 2009, they reported the death of 3,243 – three thousand, two hundred and forty three men, women and children, having attempted the journey to Spanish Coasts.²²

The subject of the installation is the death at sea of the people undertaking their dangerous voyages, fighting for survival; its content is Kempadoo’s desire to give visibility to this tragedy. On her website, she writes that her images “were created in response to the media coverage of crossings made during 2007”, the demagogical and non-human rendering of the deaths of an incredible number of human beings during the mass migrations from Africa to Europe, especially to Spain.²³ The artist

²¹ Derek Walcott, “The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?”, in R. D. Hamner, ed., *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott* (Boulder, London: Lynne Rienner, 1997), 53.

²² R. Kempadoo, *Arrival* (2010), <http://vimeo.com/25865314>, 11 March 2012.

²³ See <http://www.roshinikempadoo.co.uk>, 11 March 2012.



Fig. 3: Roshini Kempadoo, screen still from *Arrival: Part One*, 2010. Courtesy of the artist

interrogates the construction of the phenomenon by the media, the truthfulness in their coverage, reflecting also on the connections between the reality of the event and its photographic rendering. The resulting installation is an act of re-appropriation both of history and of technology: if Western culture manipulates the conditions of races and peoples, the power of photography can be differently claimed to show the other side of the story and to reveal the other narrations suppressed by official history. This is the reason why contemporary migration is specifically constructed as the result of slavery and colonialism. In a postcolonial vein, Kempadoo criticizes the erasure of slavery from western consciousness, and the consequent ignorance of the role that its 'adventure' plays in the present economic and cultural system. As Paul Gilroy states,

²⁴ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 189-190.

[i]t seems as if the complexity of slavery and its location within modernity has to be actively forgotten if a clear orientation to tradition and thus to the present circumstances of blacks is to be acquired Slavery, which is so deeply embedded in modernity, gets forgotten.²⁴

In *Arrival*, Kempadoo envisions the voyage of a *patera* (a boat) of 40 people, on its difficult route from Morocco to Spain. During the journey, the traffickers throw some of the people into the water; many die, and only few are rescued. On the screens the images of this terrible happening alternate with the fictional tales of some of the women who have experienced the traumatic voyage: the woman who died at sea, the artist herself who is investigating the crossing. Their fictional stories are not separated one from the other, but rather follow their juxtaposition on the screens, as if to embody the dis-connected narratives of their diaspora. Some women die during the journey, while others arrive to Spain and settle there. The installation ends with the inscription of some images of veiled African women dancing against the background of the photos of an apartment in Sevilla, its walls decorated in Arabic writing, the last traces of a common tragedy. On the screens, at their closing moment, against the background of the water and the sand of the sea, the waves impress sometimes the trace of a female face on the foam; some other times, they silently bring ashore the remains of a corpse...

Women's Voices in Julie Otsuka's *The Buddha in the Attic*

Julie Otsuka, born in California to Japanese parents, started her career as a painter, but turned to literary writing at the age of 30, when she felt the need to bear testimony to her ancestors's stories. In a similar way as Levy's poetics, Otsuka begins her writing from the closest and most personal events, and then dives into the past, so as to be able to highlight her people's experiences of the 'voyage', the passage or the crossing of the ocean between Japan and the United States. Otsuka has published two novels so far. *When The Emperor Was Divine* (2002) deals with the personal memory of an episode that took place during World War II, when her grandfather was arrested as a spy, and her grandmother, her mother, and her uncle had to spend three years

in a Japanese internment camp in the desert of Utah. *The Buddha in the Attic* (2011), which constitutes a sort of prelude to the first novel, goes back to 1920s, and tells the 'strange' experience of the Japanese migration to America through the memories of the so-called 'picture brides'. It is a story that Otsuka intensively researched:

I read a lot of oral histories and history books, and old newspapers. I had to learn about two worlds: the old Japan from which the picture brides came, and the America of the 1920s and 1930s which they immigrated to. I kept many notebooks filled with detailed notes about everything.²⁵

Quite dissimilar from any historical genre (whose main feature is, for instance, its length), this novel, influenced by the Japanese *zuihitsu*, relates women's experiences of immigration. Its originality lies in the absence of 'one' protagonist: the narrative belongs to a chorus of women's voices identified with the plural pronoun 'we'. As Otsuka writes, "in my research, I came across so many stories, and I wanted to weave them all in, so the entire book is in the 'we' voice. There is no main character."²⁶ This choice might depend on the character of the diasporic condition, which cannot be told by one voice, or it can specifically link to Japan as an oriented group culture. In any case, for the writer, the subject 'we' belongs to a genealogy of women who, in the most disparate geographical places and historical periods, have crossed and still cross the oceans and the seas to satisfy their dreams, to survive against impossible conditions, and to find a future elsewhere.²⁷

Here Otsuka's key word is 'genealogy', the historical approach that does not imply any linear return to an origin, but constitutes a practice of reading the past in its – real or imagined – discontinuities. Michel Foucault, drawing the term from Nietzsche, explains the genealogical conception of history as what is distanced from any rational continuity or evolutionary process, in order to reveal the real composition of its course made of breaks and disparities. The genealogical re-building of the past interprets the dominance of certain discourses, with the decision to re-present forgotten, or partially known, events in different ways. In Foucault's thinking, 'genealogy' is precisely opposed to the search for a pure and uncontaminated beginning:

Genealogy is gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times. ... [G]enealogy retrieves an indispensable restraint: it must record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality; it must seek them in the most uncompromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history – in sentiments, love, conscience, instincts; it must be sensitive to their recurrence, not in order to trace the gradual curve of their evolution, but to isolate the different scenes where they engaged in different roles. Finally, genealogy must define even those instances where they are absent, the moment when they remained unrealized.²⁸

In *The Buddha in the Attic* the words-images used by Otsuka are genealogical in that they traverse the past of Japanese immigration to the States, without inscri-

²⁵ Jane Ciabattari, "Tragedy of the Picture Brides", <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2011/09/16/julie-otsuka-talks-about-new-novel-the-buddha-in-the-attic.html>, 27 February 2012.

²⁶ Cordelia Palitz, "Q&A with Julie Otsuka", *Student Life*, September 16, 2009, <http://www.studlife.com/news/2009/09/16/qa-with-julie-otsuka/>, 10 March 2012.

²⁷ Patrick Ryan, "Interview with Julie Otsuka", <http://www.granta.com/New-Writing/Interview-Julie-Otsuka>, 20 March 2012.

²⁸ Michel Foucault, "Genealogy, Nietzsche, History", in *Language, Counter-Memory Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 139-140.

²⁹ As Otsuka says, writing is like painting: "If you're a painter, ... you set out your colors on your pallet, you put a mark on the canvas ... you add, you take away. It's the same thing with writing." Penelope Lively, "An Extraordinary Evocation of an Ignored Episode in American History. Outstanding." http://readers.penguin.co.uk/nf/shared/WebDisplay/0,178908_1_10,00.html, 14 March 2012.

bing it into any continuity of male-dominated history.²⁹ In her *Feminist Genealogies*, Chandra Mohanty argues that a female genealogy and a female legacy cannot be considered as fixed terms, but as forms of thought that, by dismantling both history and historiography, focus on the personal experiences of women:

Thus, our use of the words like 'genealogies' or 'legacies' is not meant to suggest a frozen or embodied inheritance of domination and resistance, but an interested, conscious thinking and rethinking of history and historicity, a rethinking which has women's *autonomy* and *self-determination* at its core.³⁰

³⁰ M. Jaqui Alexander, Chandra T. Mohanty, eds., *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), xvi.

A female genealogy, which cannot be discovered once and for all, implies a continuous rethinking, an analytic perspective that reads the autonomy and self-determination of women. Otsuka's novel breaches the oblivion where women's stories have been discarded. She places the picture brides at the heart of her narration that, delicately and passionately, uncovers the struggle, the force, the courage, the dreams and, at the same time, the deception at these women's expense. Such uncovering refuses to be contained within any narrative limits: the insistent repetition of the (grammatical) subjects that bear the burden of the storytelling – 'some of us', 'most of us', 'one of us' – produces a musicality and a sonority that evokes a variety of literary forms. Although written in prose, the stories follow the rhythm of poetry, and, in the evocation of a chorus of female voices, they resemble theatre, as if the readers could be imaginatively taking part to a classical tragedy. The style is evocative and precise at the same time: the sections of the novel *Come, Japanese!*, *First Night*, *Whites*, *Babies*, *The Children*, *Traitors*, *Last Day* and *A Disappearance* tell, with extreme precision, the different phases of the migration process, from the departure of the picture brides to their arrival in America, to the difficulties they face in the new country. The *incipit* opens up by disseminating the most disparate perspectives on the boat-journey:

On the boat we were mostly virgins. We had long black hair and flat wide feet and we were not very tall. Some of us had eaten nothing but rice gruel ... and some of us were only fourteen years old and were still young girls ourselves. Some of us came from the city, ... but many more of us came from the country Some of us came from the mountains, ... some of us were the daughters of fishermen³¹

³¹ Julie Otsuka, *The Buddha in the Attic* (London: Penguin Book, 2011), 3; hereafter in the text.

Through the plurality of the novel's points of view, Otsuka keeps track of the singularity of each experience, neglecting none. If the Japanese immigration to the USA is characterized by displacement, racism, dis-integration and misery, it also presents its positive aspects: the multifaceted diaspora appears in its nuances, where each of its experiences is worth to be told. As Edward Said argues in *Reflections on Exile*, the diasporic experience is not to be considered only in its loss, displacement and up-rootedness; living between many spaces and many cultures might also signify a privilege: "Seeing the entire world as a foreign land makes possible the originality of vision."³² Said's perspective is shared by Otsuka's narration of the picture brides, the mail order brides who leave Japan to come to America with the photos of their unknown husbands in their hands, full of expectations, confident

³² Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays*, (London: Granta Book, 2000), 186.

in the letters announcing a promising America. Their narration starts in the 1920s, when these women cross the ocean in terrible conditions:

On the boat we slept down below, in steerage, where it was filthy and dim. Our beds were narrow metal racks stacked one on top of the other and our mattresses were hard and thin and darkened with the stains of other journeys, other lives (4).

The displacement of this voyage is not the first and it will not be the last in history: the boat echoes the presence of those who crossed the ocean before. During the transit, the women share the photos of their husbands, tell their stories, suffer from seasickness, fall in love with mariners, and comfort each other. Some die during the crossing, and others reach the American coast. The boat they are travelling on pullulates with passions, emotions, affects, fears and hopes. Whatever the attitude of the collective entity, for each of these women America means the future: “Because we were on the boat now, the past was behind us, and there was no going back” (12). Throughout the voyage, imagination is fuelled by the ‘dream of America’, which appears as a land of endless opportunities, especially for women. If, in Japan, they work in the fields, without any chance of changing their lives, or if, when coming from poor families, they are sold to geisha homes, in their minds during the journey, America can only be a better place:

But even the most reluctant of us had to admit that it was better to marry a stranger in America than grow old with a farmer from the village. Because in America the women did not have to work in the fields and there was plenty of rice and firewood for all (7).

America is a mythic place, with dreams of big houses and chimneys; at the same time, it feels as an alien land, in its physical, geographical, religious and social difference from Japan. Soon after their landing in the beloved and different new home, the women experience the contact zones, the ‘borderlands’, as Gloria Anzaldúa would call them, between two worlds, two stories, two sides and two cultures:

The Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is ... a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants.³³

For Otsuka, living at the border is an existential condition that concerns the cleavage between two places and two cultures – the Japanese and the American – where the hosting one needs Japanese labor but is, at the same time, unable to accept the guest. This contact zone is announced by the little statue belonging to one of the women, the ‘Buddha’ of the title: “Haruko left a tiny laughing brass Buddha up high, in a corner of the attic, where he is still laughing to this day” (109). The statue is the symbol of everything that the women have left behind at home, before starting the dramatic journey that will deport them even to internment

³³ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderland/La Frontera, The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999), 25.

camps. Life is hard in America for a Japanese woman, who finds only low-wage jobs, often becoming the victim of racial prejudice. And history does not help: in 1942 the bombing of Pearl Harbor made the situation more unbearable for most of them. The ‘native’ people started looking at the ‘marked’ immigrants in fear and suspicion. Day after day, the Japanese or the Japanese-Americans were arrested by the FBI and forced to leave the country. The Executive Order 9066, signed by President Franklin Roosevelt, finally sentenced them to internment camps. The end of the novel hints at the emptiness left behind by the unreasonable disappearance of these people. What is different now is that, after the crossing of Otsuka’s novel, this inexplicable absence affects the ones who sent them away, the American townspeople who still cannot understand their violent and cruel historical negation:

The Japanese have disappeared from our town. Their houses are boarded up and empty now ... abandoned cars sit in their driveways. Thick knotty weeds are sprouting through their lawns, stray cats wander. Last loads of still cling to the line. In one of their kitchen – Emi Saito’s – a black telephone rings and rings (115).

Conclusion

I have carried out my brief journey into the African, the Caribbean and the Japanese diaspora accompanied by three extraordinary writers: Andrea Levy, Roshini Kempadoo and Julie Otsuka. Their *œuvres* articulate the forgotten, marginalized or ignored experiences of a crossing that belongs, as a foundational act, to a whole community of women. In the tales of transit narrated by Levy, constructed by Kempadoo and celebrated by Otsuka, the female protagonists listen to the wisdom of a memory that, surfacing from the bottom of the ocean, haunts their lives like a ghost. Under the spell of such wisdom, they – we, you – cross the oceanic routes in the present, looking back at a cruel past, at the same time staying hopeful in the future to-come. What history has inscribed on their minds and bodies cannot be put under the rug; still these women are certain that, with the support of writing, art and technology, they can re-appropriate their subjectivities and creative agency, beyond all forms of historical oblivion, social erasure and oppressive silence.

“Life with an Adaptor, so We Don’t Burn Ourselves” The Book, Memory, and the Museum in Dubravka Ugrešić’s Poetics of Exile

One of the effects of wars is that they redraw the geographical and political boundaries, giving birth to newer nation states. ‘Narration’, the ‘book’ and ‘memory’ can be the counter-strategies to the destruction of war, in that they keep trace of the old boundaries, at the same time drawing new maps that provide inclusion rather than exclusion.

In this essay, I shall illustrate how the Croatian exile writer Dubravka Ugrešić mingles the technologies of the book, art and memory to keep her “ex-country” – as she names Former Yugoslavia – alive.¹ I shall show that these strategies, which she embraces with self-irony as well as political irony, are essential for her to write about the condition of exile and to survive displacement and dispossession. Together with her country, she lost the values and the material culture that it represented. Ugrešić’s novels, published in the aftermaths of the Balkan civil war, are peopled by exiles, expatriates and dislocated characters. Through a close reading of her texts, I shall illustrate her understanding and plural definitions of exile, particularly concentrating on *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*, the novel where she combines narration and visual art among her numerous interesting writing strategies, and where she creates a photographic album and a true life museum through the stories and the life fragments she portrays.²

Between Asylum and Exile

In the introduction to the Italian translation of Ugrešić’s novel *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*, the writer Predrag Matvejević, who originally comes from former Yugoslavia, describes Ugrešić’s condition as being “between asylum and exile”.³ Ugrešić has never asked for political asylum and considers exile as the natural condition for a writer. She therefore lingers in between the two, always elsewhere, proudly acknowledging her status as a nomad.

Dubravka Ugrešić was born in 1949 in Zagreb, capital of Croatia, which, at that time, was a State within the Federal ‘popular’ (changed to ‘socialist’ in 1963) Republic of Yugoslavia. Now Yugoslavia is a thing of the past. It became an “ex-Country”, as Ugrešić calls it,⁴ and in its place there are now other states. When the Balkan war burst out in the 1990s, Ugrešić was working as a researcher and a teacher in contemporary Russian literature at the prestigious Institute for Literary Sciences of the Faculty of Philosophy of the Zagreb University. She tried to keep a neutral position in regard to the conflict between Croats and Serbs, but her works and articles were not appreciated by the government that began to see her as a

¹ Dubravka Ugrešić, *The Ministry of Pain* (New York: Harper, 2007), 52.

² Dubravka Ugrešić, *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*, trans. by Celia Hawkesworth (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1998).

³ “Tra asilo ed esilio”, in Ugrešić, *Il museo della resa incondizionata* (Milano: Bompiani, 2002), 5, my translation. The expression is more suggestive in Italian, as the two terms are phonetically close.

⁴ Ugrešić, *The Ministry of Pain*, 52.

dissident. As when, in medieval times, those in power used to burn witches at the stake, the Croatian nationalist propaganda machine tried, with metaphorical fires and other pressures, to silence those intellectuals who were not writing articles praising its work and who dared to openly challenge authority. Ugrešić was one of those dissenting voices, denouncing the lack of alternative information to what was narrowly provided by the government, and accusing it of forging false information and manipulating it in order to maintain political power.⁵

The nationalist propaganda began to exercise pressure against the writers who dared to disagree, Ugrešić included. Ugrešić was soon accused of treason. In 1992, the Croatian journalist Slaven Letica, in an (initially unsigned) article that appeared in the weekly magazine *Globus* and that was entitled “Croatian Feminists Rape Croatia”, accused five Croatian women writers of betraying Croatia.⁶ He named these women “witches”, following the Slav tradition that employed the words *vještica* or *veštica* (signifying “witch”) to denigrate women who did not fit into the typical model of the woman under Communism by seeing them as “conniving, ill-intentioned, bitter, secretive, and odd”.⁷ All these events led Ugrešić to finally quit her land in 1993: “I invested my own money in the purchase of my broom. I fly alone.”⁸ She first flew to the United States and subsequently to Amsterdam, where she now resides (with regular trips and overseas stays that can last several months, making her into an intellectual nomad). Ugrešić is still attached to the multicultural state of former Yugoslavia, which was and remains her only homeland. Ugrešić regularly visits Croatia, but she has not declared her intention to return there to live and work. After her self-exile, her first public appearance was in Croatia in 2004, to promote her book *The Ministry of Pain*. Although she lives abroad and can speak other languages, Ugrešić writes all her books in Croatian.⁹ Her works have been translated into many languages. She has received several literary awards for her writing, which is considered innovative, intelligent, and infused with political and emotional value. These prizes show the international recognition of her work, but they also appear as markers on the map of her nomadic life.

‘Life without a Tail’: Exile and Memory

As already mentioned, Ugrešić’s books written in the wake of the Balkan civil war – *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*, *Thank you for Not Reading*,¹⁰ and *The Ministry of Pain* – describe the experience of exile and are peopled by exilic characters – refugees, immigrants, nomads and expatriates whom she meets all around the world. In these texts, the author provides a series of definitions and metaphors for exile, all of which are partial. Exile does not allow for a single, comprehensive definition. To understand it as a whole, we have to compile all the definitions, the stories and the images, the photographs, and the fragments taken from the lives of people she encounters and feels close to.

In Ugrešić’s *Thank You for Not Reading*, there is a chapter dedicated to the “Writer in Exile” where the writer gives us the tools to read and interpret exile

⁵ Ugrešić complains about this situation, though not without irony, in *The Culture of Lies. Antipolitical Essays* (London: Phoenix, 1998, first published in Croatian in 1995).

⁶ The other intellectual women accused of being ‘witches’ are Slavenka Drakulić, Rada Iveković, Vesna Kesić, Jelena Lovrić: http://womenineuropeanhistory.org/index.php?title=The_Five_Witches, 1 December 2012.

⁷ Obrad Kesić, “Women and Gender Imagery in Bosnia: Amazons, Sluts, Victims, Witches, and Wombs”, in Sabrina P. Ramet, ed., *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans: Women and Society in Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav Successor States* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1999), 198.

⁸ Ugrešić, *The Culture of Lies*, 273.

⁹ Before the war, the language spoken in Croatia was called Serbo-Croatian or Croatian-Serbian. In *The Ministry of Pain* Ugrešić criticizes the way in which the new governments destroy their common language, as they have done with their land.

¹⁰ Dubravka Ugrešić, *Thank You For Not Reading* (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2003).

¹¹ Ugrešić, *Thank You*, 127-148.

¹² Quoted in Ugrešić, *Museum*, 85.

literature and to understand exile in general.¹¹ One after the other, she quotes and mingles her definitions with those given by other writers who have been, or still are, in exile. This chapter is the first of Part 5, whose title, “Life without a Tail”, plunges into the dimension of exile seen as a condition where there are no milestones, reference points or possibilities of orientation. This is the reason why exile must appeal to memory, the kind of steering wheel that leads and holds the right course of our life. As Brodskij writes: “Memory, I think, is a substitute for the tail that we have lost for good in the happy process of evolution. It directs our movements, including migration. Apart from that there is something clearly atavistic in the very process of recollection, if only because such a process never is linear.”¹² The nomad, the exile, the immigrant are usually represented as figures carrying a ‘suitcase’, the object that symbolizes the nomadic predicament and which also points to the necessity not to travel with cumbersome luggage. Ugrešić challenges this vision of the exile through another image:

I had a dream. I was at an airport, waiting for someone. Finally the person I was waiting for, a woman of my age, appeared. Before we got into a taxi, I asked her
“Don’t you have any luggage?”
“No, I just have lifeage”, said the woman.
The sentence my double had spoken could be translated: Life is the only luggage I carry with me.¹³

¹³ Ugrešić, *Thank You*, 127.

In Ugrešić’s world, the luggage an exile can carry is his/her *life-age*, a neologism through which she conveys the idea that everything we can carry with us, in our displaced routes, is contained in our body and in our souvenirs. Life coincides with memory.

A Book: The Museum of a Life in Exile

The title of the novel *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender* suggests that we should think of it through the metaphor of the museum. The chapters, each of a different length, are indeed like the rooms and the sections in a museum. The chapters with odd numbers (1, 3, 5, and 7) are veritable collections of objects: they consist of numbered paragraphs, like captions next to objects in a museum. They do not tell a single story: they are short sketches, descriptions, images, one different from the next, but linked with one another in some way. Their series reflect the functioning of the human brain, the stream of thoughts. The other chapters in even numbers (2, 4, and 6) are longer and more coherent, and each tells a story. We can consider these longer chapters as monothematic rooms in a museum, organized around a single topic. Apparently, there are no solid links between the different parts; they resemble fragments of a life in exile. It is the reader who must find, create, or recreate the links between the pieces of the puzzle, as the author writes in the prologue. She describes a glass case in the Berlin zoo, which unusually displays the objects found in the stomach of Roland, the walrus:

The visitor stands in front of the unusual display, more enchanted than horrified, as before archaeological exhibits. The visitor knows that their museum-display fate has been determined by chance (Roland's whimsical appetite) but still cannot resist the poetic thought that with time the objects have acquired some subtler, secret connections. Caught up in this thought, the visitor then tries to establish semantic coordinates, to reconstruct the historical context...

The chapters and fragments which follow should be read in a similar way. If the reader feels that there are no meaningful or firm connections between them, let him be patient: the connections will establish themselves of their own accord.¹⁴

¹⁴ Ugrešić, *Museum*, 1.

As Ugrešić states in an interview, this novel follows the principle of a film cutting or a collage of elements.¹⁵ It can be read as an artistic installation, such as those that she reviews in her book. There are no true characters, apart from the 'I' of the narrating voice, which can be identified as the author herself. The protagonist is memory. This explains why the author has chosen a text that resembles a museum to focus on exile. Only through this style can she approach her topic. Exile itself is a style, a narrative strategy. A life in pieces can only be recounted through pieces, fragments, and images.

The story of an exile can be narrated through the series of apartments rented and then left, or through the essential, simple objects one buys over and over and then leaves behind, like a coffee machine or a suitcase. The story of the exile is also recounted by the stamps one has in his/her passport:

What could I have replied? That exile, or at least the form of it that I was living with increasing weariness, is an immeasurable state. That exile is a state which can admittedly be described in measurable facts – stamps in one's passport, geographical points, distances, temporary addresses, the experience of various bureaucratic procedures for obtaining visas, money spent who knows how often on buying a new suitcase – but such a description hardly means anything. That exile is the history of the things we leave behind, of buying and abandoning hairdryers, cheap little radios, coffee pots That exile is changing voltages and kilohertz, life with an adaptor, so we don't burn ourselves. The exile is the history of our temporary rented apartments, the first lonely mornings as we spread out the map of the town in silence, find on the map the name of our street and mark it with a cross in pencil. (We repeat the history of the great conquerors, with little crosses instead of flags.) Those little, firm facts, stamps in our passports, accumulate and at a certain moment they become illegible lines. Then they suddenly begin to trace an inner map, the map of the unreal, the imaginary.¹⁶

¹⁵ *Bili Izvan*, Dubravka Ugrešić Pitanja Postavljala Ana Ristović 3-4, http://www.b92.net/casopis_rec/60.6/pdf/111-122.pdf, 3 March 2012.

¹⁶ Ugrešić, *Museum*, 119.

The adaptor, the suitcase, the hairdryers and the coffee pots left and bought over and over again, the stamps and the visas in the passports: these objects are the metaphors of exile. In her words, "exile is a lesson in adaptation".¹⁷ Exile is a mosaic of languages, places, nations/nationalities visited and encountered elsewhere – it is a displacement of nationalities. Nations are displaced through their citizens who travel around the world, and re-build their homeland wherever they happen to land. Therefore, exile gives a sense of disorientation and confusion – feelings that are increased in the encounter with other de-localized individuals. If the intensity of the movement and the de-localization of people in the world

¹⁷ Ugrešić, *Thank You*, 136.

today has reached very high levels, in walking in the streets of a particular city, one cannot avoid the impression of being elsewhere. Neighborhoods in one city become the holograms of other places:

¹⁸ Ugrešić, *Museum*, 110.

Berlin is a mutant city. Berlin has its Western and its Eastern face: sometimes the Western one appears in East Berlin, and the Eastern one in West Berlin. The face of Berlin is criss-crossed by the hologram reflections of some other cities. If I go to Kreuzberg I shall arrive in a corner of Istanbul, if I travel by S-bahn to the edges of Berlin, I can be sure I shall reach the outskirts of Moscow.¹⁸

In exile, all nations and nationalities are mixed. Nations travel through spoken languages and through the coffee bars that one can find in the least expected places:

¹⁹ Ibid., 111.

In Kantstrasse, where Russian is spoken in many places, there is a Café Paris. On Savignyplatz there is the Café Kant, right next to the Café Hegel. Hegel is written in Latin script on one side of the sign, and on the other in Cyrillic. The Cyrillic side faces the neighbouring brothel. In East Berlin there is Café Pasternak. The windows of the Pasternak look on to an imposing round structure made of red brick, a water tower. The tower served as one of the 'handy' prisons for Berlin Jews. In Kreuzberg there is the Café Exile. On the other side of the street, separated from it by a canal, is the Café Konsulat.¹⁹

The two Cafés Exile and Konsulat are one in front of the other, as ironic and sad reminders of the inextricable link between exile and the inexhaustible administrative and bureaucratic procedures that exiles have to go through.

Another condition of exile is the perpetual looking for home and the impossibility to return home. Home and the wall are the elements we find in both Ugrešić's life and Christa's, a woman she meets in New York. Christa and Dubravka seem to have parallel lives, both characterized by the impossibility to return somewhere that could be called 'home':

²⁰ Ibid., 143.

In those two and a half kitchen-months I discovered that Christa was tormented by two nightmares. They were both connected in a double knot, but one was insoluble and the other, at least from my perspective, soluble. The name of the first, insoluble, one was the Berlin Wall, and the name of the other, soluble, one was old-fashioned but none the less painful: home. Around them, like large spools, Christa wound the taut threads of her life.²⁰

²¹ Ibid., 142.

The idea of a wall and the idea of looking for a home are common elements of the two biographies, Dubravka's and Christa's, which have been "joined by nothing other than Sally's general grasp of geography".²¹ Dubravka does not have a home, because it was swept away by the civil war. She changes places, jobs, and houses, and in this she is like Christa, who changes countries, houses, and lovers whenever she seems to have found one. Christa's home has been destroyed by the fall of the Berlin Wall. She cannot go back to Berlin because she does not recognize her old city. On the other hand, in the heart of the old nation Yugoslavia, there is

a border, an invisible wall that is more terrible than any visible one, because it was erected in the hearts of people, and separates them from one another.

The two women are doomed to travel through lands and countries without the possibility to find home again. Since her escape from former Yugoslavia, Ugrešić has lived in a state of exile, like a nomad. She wanders through the world, changes countries, apartments and kitchens. Hers is a life on the move. Places elapse before your eyes, but you cannot grasp them, you cannot stop long enough to make a new home. No place becomes home; it can only play the part of a temporary host for the exile, who passes through it, in a perpetual renewal of daily actions repeated time and time again. The person in exile is just a passerby: as in airports or stations, the exile traverses a series of places, corridors, waiting halls, maybe waiting for a better future. All these places are impersonal and look the same, as the waiting rooms and the lounges in airports and train stations. They offer no sense of belonging. They are no-man's lands, in-between spaces, spaces of transit, as Rosi Braidotti beautifully describes in her *Nomadic Subjects*: "stations and airport lounges, trams, shuttle buses, and check-in areas. In between zones where all ties are suspended and time stretched to a sort of continuous present. Oasis of nonbelonging, spaces of detachment. No-(wo)man's lands."²²

In these spaces time seems not to exist, suspended and flowing differently from "home", from the places one has left. Contrary to what can be imagined, these transit areas are also densely populated – as Ugrešić comments, "Europe was full of people like me".²³ The in-between status is not a pleasant condition, as it gives the feeling of permanent exclusion, and of not belonging. In Braidotti's words, such transit zones as, for instance, the European community, "is crowded at the margins, and nonbelonging can be hell".²⁴

²² Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects. Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 18-19.

²³ Ugrešić, *Museum*, 148.

²⁴ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 20.

Memory and Photography: The Poetics of the Album

The novel *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender* is built around a poetics of the family album, as suggested by the first chapter of Part II.²⁵ It is a poetics of the detail, of the fragment, of the snapshots we take through life, and that we connect through memory. They reflect the functioning of memory, as if, without the photos, memories would be doomed to vanish. Memory is not linear; it proceeds in associations of ideas and images. Ugrešić defines photography as

a reduction of the endless and unmanageable world to a little rectangle. A photograph is our measure of the world. A photograph is also memory. Remembering means reducing the world to little rectangles. Arranging the little rectangles in an album is autobiography.

Between the two genres, the family album and autobiography, there is undoubtedly a connection: the album is a material autobiography, autobiography is a verbal album.²⁶

²⁵ Ugrešić, "The Poetics of the Album", *Museum*, 15.

²⁶ Ugrešić, *Museum*, 30.

The photographs are our memories, which in order to take on a meaning, need to be rearranged in albums, museums and narrations. Life is so dense that it would

be unmanageable without a selection of the memories to be remembered. Does memory exist without photographs? Is it possible to remember the details, the faces, and the places besides those we take snapshots of?

During one trip abroad I bought a cheap automatic camera, and once the object was already there I shot several films. After some time I looked through the photographs and established that the scenes I had photographed were all I remembered of that journey. I tried to remember something else, but my memories stayed tenaciously fixed on the contents of the photographs.

²⁷ Ibid., 23.

I wondered what I would have remembered and how much if I had not taken any picture.²⁷

It seems that Ugrešić's answer to my questions is 'no'. She seems to say that memory needs technology to be 'saved' somewhere: photography or narration can provide a meaning to the fragments that are scattered in memory. Like photography, memory too is selective and it cannot contain everything. Memory contains details, a kind of summary of the real life: "What memory has in common with art is the knack for selection, the taste for detail. ... Memory contains precise details, not the whole picture; highlights, if you will, not the entire show."²⁸

²⁸ Ibid., 55.

Through the selection of the visual field of a picture, we give an order to the infinite world that would otherwise be impossible to grasp. This is related to the difference between looking and seeing: we can see and understand the world only when we apply a perspective, when we look at it through a viewpoint. To make sense of the world, it would be enough to curl one's fingers around one's eyes or look through the small paper tube in the form of a telescope, as children normally do:

I remember that as children we used to curl our fingers into a 'telescope', put them to our eyes and with a special jokingly threatening intonation announce to our partner in the game or those in the game or those around us: 'I see you!' Later we replaced our hands with paper tubes. The tubes reduced the boundless and unmanageable world, to a little piece of world to something bounded and manageable, to a little piece of world, a little circle, a frame. The little tube presupposed choice (I can examine this or that). Broken down into little circles, the world through the white paper tunnel reached the eye in sharpened beauty. The jokingly threatening exclamation – I see you! – acquired its full meaning. Through the little tube one really could see, without the tube one only looked. With the help of a single paper tube one could achieve the desired measure of the world, the photograph.²⁹

²⁹ Ibid., 29-30.

"Was ist Kunst?": Memory, Art, and Literature

"Was ist Kunst?" is the title of the fifth part of *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*. This section, like the first, the third and the seventh, is composed of numbered paragraphs. Here, Ugrešić interrogates 'art' and its possible function. According to the author, art (this term includes all the arts: plastic, visual and the literary) is the means by which the artist seeks to find the relationships between the things in the world. Art creates the links between the fragments of life; it helps navigate through the scattered pieces which make up the mosaic of the world.

In other words, art is a technology to survive in the ocean of dispersed scraps of life: “‘Was ist Kunst?’ I ask a colleague. ‘Art is an endeavour to defend the wholeness of the world, the secret connection between all things’.”³⁰ Through art, the details get their place in the web of life, and they relate to other details. This book, therefore, as the author says, is itself an attempt to give an order to the fragments that make up Ugrešić’s life: it gathers all the people and friends whom she met in the street and who had some importance for her. This text is also a hypertext: it shows/creates different links every time you read it, because its elements refer to each other, in a continuous repetition. The reader can choose to follow a certain path rather than another, and jump from one page to another without necessarily following the order of the pages. There is a strong bond between life and art.

³⁰ Ibid., 169.

This book also looks like one of the installations created by Richard, an English artist who lives in Berlin. Ugrešić engages in deep discussions with him, and visits his apartment, full of artistic works and experiences. Similarly to Richard’s installations, this book consists of pieces of all kinds: pieces of paper (photos, quotations from books, the pages of passports and visas), rooms in rented apartments, the waiting rooms in different consulates, where exiles wait long hours to get their visa, the airport lounges and the suitcases that accompany the life of the exile. It is a postmodern book that can be compared to a contemporary work of art looking like the real life it seeks to rebuild. At the same time, it could also represent just the opposite: isn’t it rather the real life that tries to look like a work of art? Ugrešić agrees with Russian writer Isaak Babel: “‘There is no reason why a well thought-out story should resemble real life; life strives with all its might to resemble a well thought-out story’, wrote Babel.”³¹ The connection between life and art/museum is, however, repeated several times: “All of us here are museum exhibits...”, says Zoran almost at the end of the novel.³² A little earlier, there is another remark about life and art: sometimes people do not pay enough attention to daily life, to what happens before their eyes. Real life becomes valuable when it becomes art; in other words, when it is ‘exposed’ as a piece in a museum:

³¹ Ibid., 222

³² Ibid., 231.

In some places the Wall still stands, thin and dry as Jewish matzos. Here and there, as in the courtyard of the Europe-Center, the piece of wall has been put under museum glass. Visitors to the shopping center stop in front of the glass-covered piece with interest, as though they were seeing it for the first time.³³

³³ Ibid., 233.

This note reveals a vein of criticism towards that society, which is interested in things only when they are exposed and shown with a high media profile, as it happens with wars.

Memory and War

Although war does not specifically appear in the novel, it is its constant concern. The civil war in the 90s, that broke apart the Republic of former Yugoslavia, is the direct cause for the current predicaments in which the characters of this novel

have to live. They cannot forget it, because their life is a direct consequence of it. This is the reason why memory, not war, will eventually win. War, in truth, is meant to erase the memory of individuals, peoples and nations. Still, memory survives, recalling and creating links among places and peoples:

There is a story told about the war criminal Ratko Mladić, who spent months shelling Sarajevo from the surrounding hills. Once he noticed an acquaintance's house in the next target. The general telephoned his acquaintance and informed him that he was giving him five minutes to collect his 'albums', because he had decided to blow his house up. When he said 'albums', the murderer meant the albums of family photographs. The general, who had been destroying the city for months, knew precisely how to annihilate memory. That is why he 'generously' bestowed on his acquaintance life with the right to remembrance. Bare life and a few family photographs.³⁴

³⁴ Ibid., 7.

The Balkan wars of the 1990s destroyed the community of the peoples who had formed the Federation of Yugoslavia. That war erased a whole Country from maps and made passports useless; it transformed a country into a 'former country', and its citizens into 'former citizens':

I travelled to Lisbon with a huge amount of luggage, or entirely without luggage, depending on how you looked at it. I had lost my homeland. I had not yet got used to the loss, nor to the fact that my homeland was the same, but different. In just one year I had lost my home, my friends, my job, the possibility of returning soon, but also the desire to return.... At forty-five years old I found myself in the world with a bag containing the most essential items, as though the world were a bomb shelter. My memories of the shelter, where I used to go with my fellow-countrymen during the air-raid warnings, were still fresh.³⁵

³⁵ Ibid., 148.

Conclusion

To understand Ugrešić's vision of exile, the reader should compile all the definitions, the stories and the images, the photographs and the sketches that are scattered in her books, and find the links between them. Remembering, even through fragments and images, is important. It is also important to have institutions such as museums and literary texts that can ensure the preservation of memory from wearing. Often, governments and powers assume the right to rewrite history, to confiscate or to destroy memory through censorship, propaganda and war. Narration, the book and the museum can represent the technologies that save memory by keeping it alive. They also provide exiled communities with the ways in which they might locate themselves in the unknown world through unknown routes.

Exile is life with the adaptor always at hand, says Dubravka Ugrešić, "so we don't burn ourselves".³⁶ Armed with the technological device, exile people travel through the world, constantly adapting to new conditions, new environments, and new languages. The exile is forced to adapt, to negotiate and to compromise with the new space in order to survive. Exile provides a style, a technique to remember and arrange the scattered pieces of a broken life in a narrative unity, whether material or verbal. Still, if time in exile has a different flow from time at home, this order cannot be chronological, but adaptable and portable.

³⁶ Ibid., 119.

Visions of Performance in Exile: The Book, the Exhibition, and the Digital Archive

Performance is as much about forgetting as about remembering.
(Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*)

And yet, in privileging an understanding of performance as a refusal to remain, do we ignore other ways of knowing, other modes of remembering, that might be situated precisely in the ways in which performance remains, but remains differently?
(Rebecca Schneider, *Performance Remains*)

How does one interpret the afterlife of a performance when it re-appears in different contexts of fruition? How does one describe the displacement experienced by the audience – both in terms of the practice of seeing, and of critical direction – when the ephemerality of a performance is challenged by technologies of vision that offer other “ways of knowing” and new “modes of remembering”?¹ This essay adopts the trope of exile to investigate the transit of artworks dislocated from their original places of representation – or ‘homeland’ – to new critical and poetic sites of technical visibility. The critical perspective of my paper relies on the debate around the two most important issues in the expansion of Performance Studies since the 1980s: (1) whether and how performances disappear and/or remain, and (2) the question of the ‘authenticity’ of the visual media, the texts and the re-stagings through which a live event is passed down through time.²

Here, the *oeuvres* by Emily Jacir, Shilpa Gupta and Latifa Laâbissi will be introduced to emphasize the ‘exile’ of their shifting and mobile visions across temporal recurrences and spatial displacements. In particular, I will focus on Jacir’s photography in her *Were We Come From* (2001-2003), Gupta’s installation *I Have Many Dreams* (2008), and the choreography created by Laâbissi in *Loredreamsong* (2011). In their performances, the ‘here’ and ‘now’ of intense events is destined to end and disappear in time and space. Although the stigma of ephemerality attaches itself to every live performance with a sense of loss, visions of performances “remain differently”.³ Jacir’s photographic acts, for instance, are experienced in the form of reading offered by the page of a lasting ‘book’; Gupta’s voices are envisioned in the continuing space of an art ‘exhibition’; Laâbissi’s choreographic gestures are transformed into the catalogue of a ‘digital archive’.⁴

In the transition from one space to another, as in any experience of exile, the performative aspect of these artworks generates the surplus of a critical and visual interpretation which keeps on stirring the audience’s imagination. By tracing the migration of these works from one media to another, I would like to discuss how the audience (and, possibly, my reader) is taken on a journey that moves between

¹ Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains. Art and War in Time of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 98.

² See Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993), and the recent *Perform, Repeat, Record*, edited by Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield (Bristol, and Chicago: Intellect, 2012).

³ Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 98.

⁴ The performances have been selected after I read the ‘book’ *Seeking Palestine. New Palestinian Writing on Exile and Home*, edited by Penny Johnson and Raja Shehadeh (North Melbourne, Vic.: Spinifex Press, 2012), at the time I visited the ‘art exhibition’ *DigitalLife-2012*, and also during my surfing of the on-line ‘digital archive’ *re.act. feminism # 2 - performing archive* (project 2008-2013).

‘forgetfulness’ and ‘remembrance’, ‘visibility’ and ‘invisibility’, ‘access’ and ‘denial’, concentrating on the elements – the book, the exhibition, and the digital archive – that offer the new visual perceptions and the new contexts inside of which these performances disappear and re-appear, technically and poetically.

I would like to emphasize that these works belong to an aesthetics of female artists who come from various geographical, political and cultural spaces: the Palestinian Emily Jacir lives between the city of West Bank, Beirut and New York, and is particularly known for her conceptually-based photography; Shilpa Gupta lives and works in Mumbai, producing interactive videos, websites, sound-scapes and public performances; Latifa Laâbissi is an Arab dancer living in France, who creates subversive and grotesque choreographies by integrating theatre and dance, lectures, sounds and voices. Each of these artists shows a unique use of language and technology; still, we can compare them in that their works gather around the common feminist practice of ‘re-visioning’. As theorized by Adrienne Rich, ‘re-visioning’ refers to the construction of new spaces of writing, the poetical methodology which allows women to “see with fresh eyes” and, because of this, enables them to survive: “Re-vision. The act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of enter-ing an old text from a new critical direction – is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival.”⁵

The American poet and writer indicates the urgency of ‘asking women’s questions’. Jacir, Gupta and Laâbissi share and embrace such methodological practices of raising questions through their multi-disciplinary performances, which activate a critical investigation and an interrogative process that aims to prove the ability of women to creatively ‘survive’ beyond the difficulties of their exiled existences.

Reading ‘Acts’ of Memory

Our Narrative, our story is absent from history books.
(Emily Jacir, IMEU website)

In 2012, the independent researcher Penny Johnson and the lawyer and writer Raja Shehadeh asked a number of some Palestinian essayists, novelists, poets and critics to exchange reflections and memories on their exile. The resulting work is *Seeking Palestine. New Palestinian Writing on Exile and Home*, a collection of stories and visions that ‘imagine’ Palestine today. In this imaginative narrative, writing proves an act of survival; the present lives of the authors benefit from sharing their experienced historical trauma, anticipating a kind of future through their personal and collective struggles both at ‘home’ and ‘abroad’.

The condition of being in exile was the trauma experienced by 850,000 Palestinian refugees in the 1948 Nabka; for the generation of writers involved in *Seeking Palestine*, this state has been historically internalized. Along the dispersed routes from Beirut to New York, from Ramallah to the Jenin refugee camp, from Jordan to Kuwait, the multiple identities gathered around the project delve in private

⁵ Adrienne Rich, “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision”, in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978* (New York: Norton, 1979), 35. In this essay, Rich narrates how she found her female voice inside the male-dominated structure of society and literature. In infusing the term “re-vision” with new meaning, she encourages women, who have been represented as mythological tropes throughout the literatures of the past, to subvert these untrue representations.

⁶ Lila Abu-Lughod, "Pushing at the Door: My Father's Political Education and Mine", in *Seeking Palestine*, 43-61.

⁷ Rana Barakat, "The Right to Wait", in *Seeking Palestine*, 135-146.

⁸ Jean Said Makdisi, "Becoming Palestinian", in *Seeking Palestine*, 160-177.

⁹ See Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intentions and Methods* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975).

¹⁰ Susan Abulhawa, "Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna", in *Seeking Palestine*, 11.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹² Suad Amiry, "An Obsession", in *Seeking Palestine*, 76.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 77.

memories. By inscribing their remembrances, the narrators open up areas of their minds which were previously kept secret. The release of a forgotten experience, the return of an emotion can occur in the memories of childhood by the Palestinian-American scholar and writer Lila Abu-Lughod in her "Pushing at the Door: My Father's Political Education and Mine".⁶ It can materialize, as in Rana Barakat's "The Right to Wait", in the hope of returning 'home'.⁷ It can result in the practice of fixing and repairing, as in Jean Said Makdisi's "Becoming Palestinian".⁸ These strategies are meant not only as a way to inhabit, or to be dispossessed from, the lost homeland: behind and beyond each narration lies a language of resistance and revolution, an affirmation of belonging, of conservation and reconstruction.

Initially, the narrated stories and the represented visions can be acts of writing/reading that see Palestine as a new 'beginning'.⁹ The essayist Susan Abulhawa, an activist for the rights of the Palestinian children in the occupied territories, goes back to the time when she was Susie, a girl who, abandoned by her mother and growing up in an orphanage, experienced life in a different way from the majority of the Palestinians; in this sense, hers cannot but be the "Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story". At the same time, even though Abulhawa belongs to "a political discussion called 'The Question of Palestine'",¹⁰ and continues to live far from home and heritage, she is determined to re-affirm 'where she comes from'. When she writes of her Palestinian identity, and her "intifada", it is in the written act of remembrance that she involves the reader as an essential part of her personal triumph: "My stories are the stuff of my intifada. And every reader is part of my triumph."¹¹ In another poetics, which intensifies the idea of Palestine as a new 'beginning', the architect and writer Suad Amiry builds her identity as "An Obsession", along with the contradictions of a woman who, though trying to remember what it means to come from Palestine, desires to forget her 'land': "How I wish for a stroke that / will neatly delete everything related to you: thoughts, memories, emotions / Gone forever."¹² In her affirmation-denial of identity, Amiry depicts the internal exile from her mother country as a lover haunted/acted upon by ambivalent feelings of joy and grief: "Miss you / Love you / Defend you / Cry for you / Write for you / Talk about you / And, in command form, love you".¹³

Seeking Palestine, however, does not rely only on the images of the internal exile and the assumed belonging inscribed in the pieces of its writing; it also shows the visual materiality of seeking Palestine. The sections of the book – "Exile/Home", "Home/Exile" and "At Home in What World?" – are each introduced by an image from *Where We Come From*, Emily Jacir's photographic series. These pictures function as a visual interruption for the texts of the collective volume; in fact, they intertwine with the narrations by providing further actions of hope, normalcy and movement.

Born to a Bethlehem family, and growing up in Saudi Arabia, Jacir attended high school in Italy and university in USA. After living in Colorado and in Paris for a time, she now lives between Palestine and USA – a condition shared by many

diasporic Palestinians in the world. Her creations, which include installations, performances, videos, films, and pieces of writing and sound, show a unique expertise in the technologies that allow the artist to explore, from her female perspective, the condition of the Palestinian displaced, exiled and 'occupied' existence. Specifically, Jacir intends to emphasize the activism in her art by performing a series of desired and forgotten 'acts' of free movement: her personal and political work is set against the restrictions and the limits imposed both on the Palestinians under the Israeli occupation, and on the exiled people who are forbidden to travel back to their homeland.

With such engaged activism, between 2001-2003, Jacir produced the series *Where We Come From*, a collection of photographed 'acts' performed by her after she asked some Palestinians living in exile and some people who had seen their freedom of movement violently restricted by Israel, the following question: "What can I do for you in Palestine, where you can't go but I can?" Almost thirty people answered this question by asking Jacir to perform simple and everyday actions, coming from impossible memories or desires connected to past and lost circumstances, which they themselves could not realize. Their answers are translated and performed into a series of acts carried out by the artist who, by taking advantage of her American passport and "using her constitutive mobility",¹⁴ 'remembers' and acts out the tasks requested by those exiled in Europe, Syria, Lebanon and America, while also documenting the reasons why they were prohibited or restricted from entering Palestine. The outcome is a collection of photographs and texts, both in Arabic and English, which record the forgotten visions and the undermining acts of prohibition. Jihad, who owns a Gazian I.D. and who, since he left for Ramallah in 1995, has not been allowed to return home, asks Jacir: "Visit my mother, hug and kiss her and tell her that these are from her son...". Haña, born in Beirut but living in Houston, Texas, advances Jacir with the request: "Go to Haifa and play soccer with the first Palestinian boy you see on the street." Sonin, a citizen of Israel who has been forbidden entering Gaza, asks: "Go to Gaza and eat Sayadiyeh."¹⁵ In *Where We Come From*, however, the simplicity of these everyday acts collide with the complexity of being 'remembered' (the trauma is still working, producing painful effects) and, especially, of being 'fulfilled' across the physical borders and the violent limitations imposed on the exiled Palestinians. The invention carried out by Jacir is exactly that, in reading, beyond the 'stillness' of her photographs, what the audience perceives is the unbearable 'waiting' – an experience ingrained in the memory of most exiled Palestinians. As Edward Said says in his introduction to Emily Jacir's work in *Grand Street*:

For the most part, Palestinians wait: wait to get a permit, wait to get their papers stamped, wait to cross a line, wait to get a visa. Tons of wasted time, gone without a trace. ... Emily Jacir's series "Where We Come From" cuts through all that, reducing an intractably untidy mess to the simple, humane question "What can I do for you in Palestine, where you can't go but I can?" Her compositions slip through the nets of bureaucracies and nonnegotiable borders, time and space, in search not of grandiose dreams or clotted

¹⁴ Stephen Wright, quoted in Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, "Her Dark Materials", *The Daily Star*, 8 February 2006, <http://www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/art/her-dark-materials>, 1 November 2012.

¹⁵ These are the three stories from Jacir's *Where We Come From*, which were selected and included in *Seeking Palestine* by the editors.

fantasies but rather of humdrum objects and simple gestures like visits, hugs, watering a tree, eating a meal – the kinds of things that maybe all Palestinians will be able to do someday, when they can trace their way home, peacefully and without restriction.¹⁶

¹⁶ Edward W. Said on *Where We Come From* by Emily Jacir, <http://www.grandstreet.com/gsisues/g72/g72d.html>, 10 October 2012. Initially, Jacir's performance appeared as a publication to be circulated mainly in Palestine. At the time, the artist preferred the page of a book because she reckoned that, had it been exhibited in galleries, only a few people would have had the chance to see it; later, some 'remains' of this work appeared in the magazine *Grand Street*.

¹⁷ The work was recently acquired by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

¹⁸ See Wilson-Goldie, "Her Dark Materials".

¹⁹ In exploring the forbidden/forgotten memories of the Palestinian stories in the form of a book, Jacir's interest or 'poetic return' is evident in her last installation *Ex-Libris* at DOCUMENTA (13); see <http://www.alexanderandbonin.com/artist/emily-jacir>, 2 December 2012.

²⁰ See <http://www.museomacro.org/it/digital-life-human-connections>, 2 December 2012.

Jacir's art survives 'without restriction'. *Where We Come From* is, indeed, a performance-collection that keeps travelling and returning, in its condition of exile, on different planes of visual reading: from its initial publication (which only circulated in Palestine) to the issue of the magazine *Grand Street*, from its exhibition version (the first in 2003 Artspace Annex II, New Haven, Connecticut; in this occasion, Jacir organized the space using her passport, and a video with the existing texts and photographs) to the international galleries and museums.¹⁷ Recently, the 'remains' of such travelling memories return to the printed media of *Seeking Palestine*, to be read on the book's double page, through some framed texts and unframed photographs, a technical choice that Jacir explains by confessing that "I felt the photographs should not be framed because this is a dream".¹⁸ The forbidden and forgotten dreams, with the personal and collective visions, are recalled and re-performed in the 'book', which opens its pages to a global readership, finally able to overcome physical and political restrictions. Through the reading of this book, the 'hope' is that Palestinians begin the difficult process of re-memembering the exile of their own memories.¹⁹

Envisioning 'Voices' of Hope

What I am referring to are the embedded and often invisible structures that steer the way we think in daily life ... What I am interested is in the ways of looking into people's imaginations.

(Shilpa Gupta, "Embedded Structures: An Interview")

From the 'acts' inscribed in the pages of a book we move to the multimedia 'voices' of a digital exhibition. For the third year running, the Fondazione Romaeuropa has promoted *DigitalLife-2012 Human Connection*, an art exhibition devoted to the connection between creative languages and advanced technologies.²⁰ The installation is conceived and staged as a journey-like modular project, and the participating artists are invited to reflect on the relationship between space, technology, and art by creating digital artworks focused on the exploitation of human connections. The Macro Testaccio (Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Roma) is one of the hosting spaces to the exhibition. The place, previously a slaughterhouse, is an inspiring artistic home for new aesthetic creativities, where visitors are invited to wander through its re-organized architecture, and to explore a series of multimedia installations, acoustic environments and interactive works.

While walking through the exhibited digital visions in their visit to *DigitalLife-2012*, the spectators experience a condition of exile. Indeed, the path of the exhibition is covered by artworks that mainly satisfy the sense of sight: the space is mapped by

screens, installations and projections of experimental bodies and objects, activating diverse physical trajectories and critical understandings. The collective exhibition gathers some conceptual artists who investigate the plural dimensions of the aesthetic body when exposed to a digital visual domain. In the video-performance *The Onion* (2003), the body presence of Marina Abramović deals with its physical and psychological potentialities according to the repetitive gestures of the artist while eating a whole onion on the stage. In *I'm bare...dedicated to my computer* (2009), the Italian performer Ciriaca+erre explores the intimacy of computer devices in order to express, record and share her cry of liberation from creative constrictions. In moving from a screen to the next, from a body to another body, we come across the video-installation *Until the end* (2011). The Italian duo Masbedo, using HD-video technology, explore and digitally touch, with an intrusive close up, the feet of a female dancer, thus capturing its intimate and partial physicality by an extreme exercise of anti-gravity – the body's struggle to leave the ground on tiptoe.

At a first glance, these artworks stimulate and satisfy the sight as their primary phenomenological sense. When the traveller/visitor arrives at the installation untitled *I Have Many Dreams* by Shilpa Gupta, however, she is invited to activate the more imaginative, in-visible capacity of hearing. Indeed, the Indian artist investigates technology as a narrative strategy, aiming at building an 'auditive' archive of dreams and aspirations. On the exhibit space, there is actually nothing to 'see', because the installation is created by recording the aspirations of four interviewed Indian girls. "What would you like to be when you grow up?" was Gupta's question. In hearing the children's 'voices', the invisible traces of their visionary dreams, the audience is provoked to 'imagine' their stories made of hope and future.



Fig. 1: *I Have Many Dreams*, 2007-2008. Series of photographs print on canvas, sound, 168 x 137 cm each. Ph. Ela Białkowska. Courtesy GALLERIA CONTINUA, San Gimignano / Beijing / Le Moulin

²¹ See <http://shilpagupta.com/pages/2008/08girls.html>, 2 December 2012.

In *I Have Many Dreams*, Gupta presents the portraits of four Indian girls; each portrait has an audio track through which the audience listens to the girls' voices that offer four different narrations of hope, dreams and future plans.²¹ Once the headphones are on, the audience begins to move on a path of exile, visualizing the different stories told by the young women. Gupta's initial request is: "Tell me your name and age and what you would like to be when you grow up." At this point, the young performers begin dreaming: one girl wants to be an architect, another wants to become a fashion designer or a singer, a journalist, a dentist, a doctor, a dancer, a detective... Their imagination runs wild when Gupta further asks them: "What is your second or third choice?" In the displaced movement from the eye to the ear, the audience envisions a series of different dreams when, for example, it is Aadhya's voice to be digitally re-performed:

²² Ibid.

A: I want to grow up and become an artist because I love drawing and I can spend as many hours drawing because I get inspired by it and it's lot of fun and you can keep doing it everyday but some people don't like it. I don't know why but I like art, you can draw picture as you want and you don't have to copy sceneries. Sometimes you can draw whatever you want, like M.F. Hussain draws horses. But his thing is to draw horses, but he doesn't draw it clearly like it has to be a real horse, he makes front teeth pop out and all that he does, all funny stuff.

SG: If you don't get to be an artist, what is your second choice?

A: If I don't get to be an artist then I would like to be a detective because I just love to read mysteries...

SG: 3rd choice?

A: I would like to travel the world and write about it. I'll go to different countries and be a journalist may be and get all the information and check on all cool stuff.

S.G: If not this, then?

A: Then I don't know what I am going to become because I have got many dreams but I have to concentrate on only one dream so I don't know.²²



Fig. 2: *I Have Many Dreams*, 2007-2008. Photograph print on canvas, sound, 168 x 137 cm. Ph. Ela Bialkowska. Courtesy GALLERIA CONTINUA, San Gimignano / Beijing / Le Moulin

From her 'homeland' India, Aadhya's voice is spatially displaced and digitally transformed when the invisible installation travels to Europe to reach the venue of *DigitalLife-2012*. Here, through the process of 'listening' and 'imagining', the work acquires a new critical direction that cannot be extrapolated from the current Western perceptions of women in India. Right at the time of writing this paper, global attention is being given to the scandalous scale of abuse and rape suffered by Indian women. This unbearable injustice is enhancing a diffused desire to fight against all forms of private and public violence endured by women. In a society deeply impacted by globalization, and facing complex social and cultural changes, what is urgent, especially in terms of female discrimination, is a politics of gender equality and social justice. In the Indian State, often proving indifferent to, or complicit in, misogynist violence, the relevance of Gupta's

performance is exactly to discover women's future possibilities and ambitions. The voices of girls, as re-heard and re-performed in the repetitive technology of her work, acquire a particularly powerful and emotional resonance. The aspirations and expectations of the women interviewed by Gupta, lead the audience on a pleasant, invisible and auditive 'exile', where the girls' envisioned dreams can be 'visible' again, surviving in other people's imagination, becoming hopefully true in a future-to-come.

Documenting 'Gestures' of re.action

I express my convictions through my dancing, which forces me to push beyond my own taboos. When I appear naked, with this grotesque, animal quality of nudity, I scare myself; I begin questioning everything I learned from dance, everything we were taught to think about ourselves in dance and elsewhere.

(Latifa Laâbissi, "Artist's Profile", *Dancer* 281)

Another 'exile' can be proposed along the path that moves from a series of invisible voices to the hyper-visible gestures documented on an inter-active digital archive: in the wake of *re.act.feminism # 1* (2008/2009), the long-term project *re.act.feminism # 2* is designed as a living archive that gathers feminist and gender-critical performance artworks from the 1960s to date. This on-line digital domain gives access to the "detritus" of live performances in forms of visual documentation.²³ In their curatorial statement, Bettina Knaup and Beatrice Ellen Stammer explain the specific passion embodied by female creativity, the geographical perspective and the archival intention that support their project:

Since 2008, *re.act.feminism* considers feminist and gender critical performance art from the 1960s to the early 1980s as well as the 'return' of this artistic practice in the form of re-enactments, re-formulations and archival projects.... *re.act.feminism #2 – a performing archive* is a continually expanding temporary and living performance archive travelling through six European countries from 2011 to 2013. In its current version it presents performance art by 125 artists and artist collectives from Eastern and Western Europe, the Mediterranean and Middle East, the US and several countries in Latin America in the form of videos, films, photographs and texts. It will also be 'animated' through local exhibitions, screenings, performances and discussions along the way, which will continuously contribute to the archive.²⁴

What the statement underlines is that this performing archive never acquires a definitive shape. When new performances and new documents are added to its digital deposit, more archives are produced, recalling the 'fever' experienced by the philosopher Jacques Derrida: "the archivist produces more archive, and that is why the archive is never closed. It opens out of the future."²⁵ Indeed, *re.act.feminism #2* interrogates the archival thought of a performance, highlighting the "complex relationship between live performances, their traces and documents, and their reception".²⁶ Its archival structure is like a dynamic device that saves the ephemeral gesture of a performance from disappearing while keeping its eventful

²³ Matthew Reason, "Archive or Memory? The Detritus of Live Performance", *New Theatre Quarterly*, 19.1 (February 2003), 82-89.

²⁴ Bettina Knaup and Beatrice Ellen Stammer, *Curatorial Statement*, <http://www.reactfeminism.org/entry.php?l=lb&id=198&c>, 1 November, 2012.

²⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever. A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 68.

²⁶ See <http://www.reactfeminism.org/entry.php?l=lb&id=198&c>, 1 November, 2012.

appeal alive. The archive is an instrument through which individual and collective memories are re-shaped in their past and in their future by their authors and their recipients, in the process of their appropriation and re-interpretation. In other words, the project is based on the idea that the ‘productivity’ of the document asserts the dynamic quality of documentation: “Many items of performance documentation (photographs, videos, scores, etc.) acquire a life and a quality of ‘liveness’ of their own. They are often made deliberately with a future audience in mind, and for an anticipated future ‘encounter’.”²⁷

²⁷ Ibid.

In its vocation towards future encounters, the documented event is deferred and displaced, thus ‘abandoning’ its homeland or ‘original’ enactment, in order to be exiled into the traces, the texts, the images and the biographies that offer them the space and the time of other accesses and fruitions. Moving from live gestures to digital residues, the selected performances are fragmented and disseminated in the ‘spectrality’ of their disappearance and re-appearance.²⁸ According to the *téchne* of the web, other enduring gestures, proving new aesthetic and poetic translations, will emerge. As the curators repeat: “re.act.feminism takes us on a time travel, inviting us to engage in a lively dialogue beyond the limits of time and space. Our focus is not on historical reconstruction, but rather on infecting gestures and productive translations.”²⁹

²⁸ See Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Écographies de la télévision* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996).

²⁹ Knaup and Stammer, *Curatorial Statement*.

In the knowledge provided by these events lies the access to a series of performative gestures created, elaborated, produced and performed by women, who now become the ‘archons’ – those who hold the “commencement and commandment” – of a digital matri-archive that “augments itself, engrosses itself, it gains in *auctoritas*”.³⁰ Indeed, the website of *re.act.feminism* provides renewed visibility to the feminist avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s; at the same time, it hosts the oeuvres of female artists of a new generation, who recall – and ‘re.act’ to – the past gender-critical practices beyond any strategy of canonization. The cross-generational approach is supported by an archival architecture that allows the selected works to be consulted by following the artists’ names – renowned personalities are placed alongside a list of emergent performers – or by clicking on the choice of its tags, connections and references. ‘Displaced’ in their technological exile, across the archive of visions and documents, the visitors of *re.act.feminism* can choose their own routes, languages, practices, and also choose which media to consult and which performances to re-vision.

³⁰ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 2 and 68.

In surfing on *re.act.feminism* #2, I had my own experience of performative exile. Among the documents of the archived pictures, texts and corporalities, for instance, I experienced the re-emergence of the anti-fictional gestures of the Italian-American Simone Forti in her *Solo N.1* (choreography, 1974) and the improvised anti-heroic movements of the American choreographer Yvonne Rainer in *Trio A* (choreography, 1978). In their famous performances, the two members of the historical *Judson Church Group* of New York declared a new choreographic strategy based on anti-virtuous patterns of improvised dance, known today as ‘post-modern dance’. It is worth remembering how Rainer uttered her performative,

cultural and political denial and deep reaction to the canonized language of dance, often managed, choreographed and 'commanded' by male choreographers: "No to the spectacle / No to virtuosity / No to transformation and magic and make-believe / No to the glamour and transcendence of the star image / No to the heroic ...".³¹

Among the digitally archived documents I also accessed the images of the provocative Cuban Tania Bruguera who, in *Homenage a Ana Mendieta* (photographs, 1985-1996), re-enacts the exile of her fellow countrywoman in the 1970s. In the documented work, the audience witnesses Bruguera's creative attempt to bring Ana back to Cuba, as a personal and collective gesture of sisterhood in memory of the women who struggle to survive in their countries and who find a new 'homeland' or a new place of expression *elsewhere*. In the archive, these memories of the past overlap with the recorded performances interpreted by a younger generation of artists. Among these gestures, there is the live action *My Honey* (2007), where the Italian performer MaraM combines the 'matter' of her corporality with another 'materiality', thus transforming and exceeding the established discourses on the female body. Moving from the past to the contemporary time, in the direction of new performances *à-venir*, the documented gestures of 'reaction' demonstrate the incalculable potentiality of female creation and subversion. The visitor, 'exiled' across these re-appearing and anticipating performances, accesses an exclusive open archive that, in its unquestionable commitment and liquid architecture, 'reacts' against all patriarchal/patri-archival practices of consultation and documentation.

Something even more explicit happens when the visitor of the archive *re.act. feminism* encounters the choreographic work *Loredreamsong* by Latifa Laâbissi. The choreographer completed her training in dance at the Merce Cunningham Studio in New York; later on, her experimental and choreographic training was enriched by other technical and poetic gestualities, as is evident in her biography: "Dance 'codes' are disturbed by recalcitrant bodies, alternative stories, montages of materials infiltrated by certain signs of the times."³² Today, her performances are focused on the investigation of marginalized subjectivities, while her language of 'reaction' is usually shown in specific settings, such as for example, in universities, art schools and centres of choreography, which provide the appropriate places for her to express her radical perspective.

Laâbissi herself can be interpreted as a living body-archive that stores, recalls and personally re-executes the performativity of other artists. As her artistic profile explains, "her dance pieces often feature contortions of the body and grimaces, thus harking back to such artists as the radical dancer Valeska Gert".³³ The archival process, which materializes the gestures of female 'care' in selecting, sorting, storing and consulting, is what Laâbissi embodies and activates in the creative agency of her works (this was particularly relevant for her choreographed-lecture *AutoArchive*, given in 2011).³⁴ In *Loredreamsong*, the Arab-French artist, dancing with the Nigerian Sophiatou Kossoko, produces a sarcastic work that mixes the languages of theatre and dance, mimic, music

³¹ Yvonne Rainer, "No Manifesto, 1965", quoted in Rumsay Burt, *Judson Dance Theatre, Performative Traces* (London & New York: Routledge, 2006), 11.

³² See <http://figureproject.com/english/biographie/>, 13 January 2013.

³³ Artist's profile on <http://www.reactfeminism.org/>, 1 December 2012.

³⁴ See <http://figureproject.com/english/autoarchive/>, 1 December 2012.

and poetry, so as to materialize in choreographic patterns the specific question: “What does a ghost do?” The performance’s conceptual inquiry moves the gender-critical reaction to this question, into a dance that breaks with some common beliefs concerning veiled women, and with general categories affecting women, interpreting femininity as a ghost that haunts the cultural and social lore/home of their cultural inhabitation. On stage there are two ‘Arab women’ whose identities, images and corporalities are displayed as ‘ghosts’: in a masquerade of the *burqua*, their bodies are entirely covered by a long white sheet, with two holes at the eyes’ level. Later in the piece, two other dancing bodies provocatively recall two black bodies in Afro-textured hair, representing some ‘monstrous’ figures built by a myopic patriarchal vision:

Two ghosts begin singing karaoke, but the accompanying music is missing. This is the start of a truly frightening set of events: a one-hour live performance that recalls a minstrel show, a popular American entertainment format in the mid-19th century. The two white ghosts become two completely black figures with big black wigs, faces painted pitch-black and deep red mouths.³⁵

³⁵ See *Loredreamsong*, <http://www.reactfeminism.org/>, 1 December 2012.

In this sense, the title *Loredreamsong* refers to the values, gestures, and visions that belong to the female corporality when it is stereotyped in a globalized and materialistic society. The ‘dreamlike’ performance has the chance to manipulate common beliefs by dancing, challenging and disturbing the audience’s vision. The performative gestures are choreographed in a way that disseminates and discovers unexpected associations and meanings. The different languages of theatre and dance, mimic, music, and poetry, overlap and create a one-hour live feminist universe:

In several short acts, the two figures compound racist jokes, pop music fragments, twisted fairy tales, prejudice poems, propaganda speeches and preposterous gestures – all in at least four different languages – and a dance using a whole arsenal of weapons, in which the audience literally becomes a target.³⁶

³⁶ Ibid.

The excess of coverage, the exaggerated enactment of equivocal figures and folkloristic codes, and the choreography of in-accessible and monstrous bodies constitute the elements that emphasize Laâbissi’s desire to ‘re.act’ against patriarchal structures, breaking with the traditional and consolidated masks imposed upon women. Indeed, in *Loredreamsong*, the corporeal memory of Laâbissi’s and Kossoko’s body-archives re-activate the “carnavalesque body” as theorized by Mary Russo, where the dancers “make a spectacle of themselves”, calling attention to “the spectacle as process and construction”.³⁷ Here, the exploration of the movement of the disturbing silhouette of a ghost, in its veiled, anonymous and monstrous shape, constructs a choreographic pattern of gestures that manages to prove, provokingly, in-accessible – or accessible *otherwise* – to the audience’s common vision and understanding.

³⁷ Mary Russo, “Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory”, in Teresa de Lauretis ed., *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 85.

The poetic/technical in-accessibility of Laâbissi's live performance increases when it is exiled on the performing archive *re.act.feminism*. Once the live visualization of *Loredreamsong* is technically transformed into a series of 'documents', and when its visual corporalities are accessible in the texts and pictures digitally archived on the web, Laâbissi's choreography is somehow 'denied', turning into the 'ghost' of which it precisely speaks. The spectator accesses the 'residual' effects of the dance, the deferred images of the artist's gestures of reaction – which are not, because of this, less alive.³⁸ Indeed, if the pictures and the documentation cannot render the essence of the phenomenological experience of the dancing itself, the gaze of the mobi-spectator remains suspended and fulfilled by the traces left by the performance recoded 'in exile' on the web.³⁹

Conclusion

Among the accessible and inaccessible corporalities of visible or invisible voices, through the traces of forgotten and remembered acts, the virtual or actual spectator cannot experience the 'liveness' of the described performances; at the same time, she can follow the visual exile of these works in their technological 'afterlife'. Survival is poetically visualized on the pages of the book that re-offer the photographs capturing the Palestinians' memories as witnessed by Emily Jacir; 'survival' lends an ear to Shilpa Gupta's voices dreaming of the Indian women to-come on the path of her multimedia exhibition; 'survival' is finally felt when viewing Latifa Laâbissi's dance on the matri-archive of 'reacting' feminist performances. At the always-postponed end of their journeys, the female visions offered by these *oeuvres* find hospitality in the minds of the spectators encountered during their on-going 'exiles'. By moving across different technologies, they find their future in the space and time of their creative re-visions.

³⁸ For the 'expanded trace' of the 'document' – "the spoken word, the image and the gesture" – see Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

³⁹ Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance* (London: Dance Books 1966).

Myriam J. A. Chancy

Nomad*

*This piece has been reprinted and edited from a previous version entitled, "Walking Sadness: Haitian Returns", which appeared in the *Trinidad & Tobago Review* (October 2012). Republished with permission of the author. All accompanying photos ©MJA Chancy, Summer 2012.

My house says to me, "Do not leave me, for here dwells your past." And the road says to me, "Come and follow me, for I am your future." And I say to both my house and the road, "I have no past, nor have I a future. If I stay here, there is a going in my staying; and if I go there is a staying in my going. Only love and death change all things."

(Khalil Gibran, *Sand and Foam*)

I remember the white nights of excitement as we awaited the hour of departure, the ride to the airport, getting on the plane to return home.

I remember, looking for my aunts upon arrival, both in their early twenties, both counter personnel for Air France, greeting us with expectant smiles.

Later, I remember my uncle who would get us through customs and passport control, past armed guards, and the swarm of people in need of a job, who descended upon the luggage as if these were precious means to an end, some easy money. But it was never easy, among the weary tourists, the men with the guns, and the sweltering heat of the terminal.

I remember my great-grandmother, already over 100 years old, sitting on the porch of her infinitely miniscule house, which had been moved from the countryside to the yard of one of her children, who instructed us in a Kreyol I have never heard since, how to pick and eat the *quenêpes* fallen from her tree.

For years, I remembered every moment of these returns in infinite, glorious details. Indeed, they were glory days: filled with a kind of immeasurable bounty of love that is perhaps only proper to childhood, and recoverable only through the annals of nostalgia. I did not realize that they would, one day, come to an end. I did not realize that one day I would have to rely on those details to reconstruct my life. Or, perhaps, I did know. Perhaps this was why I, acting like an archivist who catalogues rare documents, accumulated impressions, gestures and events, filing them away for less glorious days, which, inevitably, arrived.

Only love and death change things. Love can also, at times, lead to certain kinds of death, or renunciation, while death can liberate, bring peace, and, with it, a certain rebirth. George Lamming once wrote that exile could bring with it an uncertain joy, that the pain and pleasure of exile were to be found in the reality that home could become wherever he found himself. There are forms of death that are simply abeyances, like plants in the sleep of winter feigning mortality only to sprout new growth and wake up in spring. Exile is like that: one travels like a tortoise in the shell.

My exile from Haiti is many decades long. By the time I found myself in Haiti post-earthquake, I had long abandoned any nostalgic sense or need for return. In the late nineteen-nineties, I had already seen Port-au-Prince drastically altered from the city of my birth, with rural Haitians making their way to the capital in desperate search of a better life. I had already seen the quiet streets of Pétion-Ville turn into market places. I had already seen the countless homeless in the historic district near the port, sleeping beneath their makeshift stalls, boarded-up buildings looming behind them. Since then, what people knew about Haiti and the Haitians has deteriorated, just like the capital, to the point that a year ago, visiting a group of women artisans in LaGonav, I overheard two American friends quietly positing they had observed great brutality in the Haitian countryside. That had to be ‘cultural’ since the Kreyol language, as they thought, did not have any word for ‘love’, and that Haitians seldom said ‘I love you’ to each other. They argued that if there was great tension and violence in rural areas, like the one where we found ourselves, it must have been because Haitians had developed an ability to be less empathic, less concerned with others. I believe they were wrong. Great despair and poverty feed violence, but violence does not necessarily serve as an indicator of lack of love.

In Kreyol there is a language for ‘love’; one can, of course, use the French *je t’aime*, which translates in Haitian as *m’rimmin ou*. When speaking generally to loved ones, the Haitians say *Pote ou byen* (Take care of yourself), *Ke Dye beni ou* (May God bless you) or *Kenbe la* (Stay strong or stay close). I responded to my friends that this was no different than, in Italian, saying *Sta’ bene* (Stay well) or, frequently, especially among family members and close friends, *Ti voglio bene* (I wish the best for you), which is often said instead of ‘I love you’. What’s more, Haitians, like Italians, demonstrate their love through actions, gestures, diminutives and expressions of affection: *cheri/e* or ‘dear’ in Haiti; *tesoro* or ‘treasure’ in Italy.

I was not sure of what motivated my friends to think that violence in Haiti was somehow natural, intrinsic, rather than cultivated through power structures that made a currency of violence (in the same way as violence proliferated both familiarly and anonymously in the US and in Italy, especially through organized crime). Violence is a human phenomenon, as is love. Where one is rewarded, the other still continues.

In communities where the most basic of needs are not met, where despair seems to rain without end, there is love of the deepest kind, the one that makes mothers (and aunts and grandmothers) and fathers sacrifice themselves for

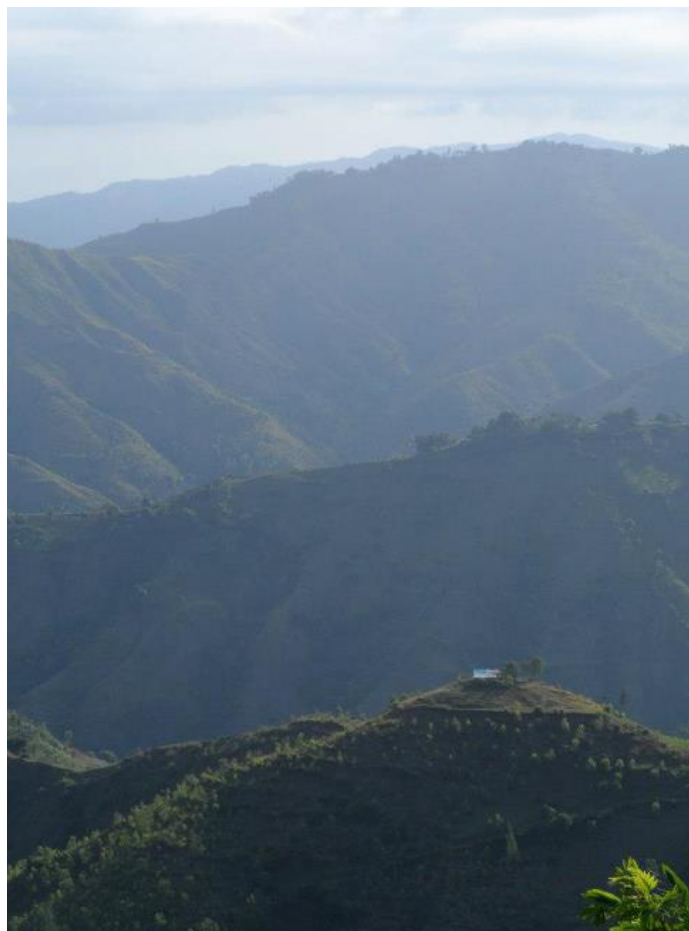


Fig. 1: View from “Rue de l’amitié”, Jacmel 2012 © MJA Chancy. Courtesy of the artist.

their children, so as to provide them with a better life than their own. The kind of desperate love that runs through the *lakou-foumi* (ant'yards or slums) and up through the working-middle-classes is the same love eternalized in *Rue Cases-Negres* by the Guadeloupean writer Joseph Zobel, and immortalized in the film by Euzhan Palcy bearing the same title. It is no wonder that some parents give up their children to strangers, Haitian and foreigners alike, in the hope that they will be better served, to find out that, often, these strangers unwittingly abandon them as *restaveks* or child-servants, abused, neglected, overworked and, even, trafficked. Even among those who 'rescue' children, there often resides a misunderstanding of the poor who sacrifice their families in baseless hope. The rescuers pick the children they think will be the most 'successful' in North America, vilifying the families of birth as if they know nothing of love. There is no attempt to reunify broken families, to provide services and securities that may keep them together, beyond any need to banish their young into the hands of strangers. The rescuers, rationalizing that Haitian culture bears no evidence of love, can sometimes decide to rescue those they perceive as the 'tenth' talented children in Haiti, who are not *restaveks* at all, but children who simply happen to be poor, working to help their families, or doing chores to help those working outside the home.



Fig. 2: Graffiti, Port-au-Prince: Haiti in Tears, 2012 © MJA Chancy
Courtesy of the artist.

After the earthquake, I heard the word 'resilient' being used, again and again, to describe Haitians moving forward with their lives. The NPR, National Public Radio in the US, runs what can only be described as 'happy' pieces about entrepreneurs in IDP (internally-displaced camps), opening up barber and hair shops, selling Digicel phone cards and other more basic staples. Actually, the merchants, to make a living, move where the people are, and those who have lost their jobs have to make-do with what they have left. I am not sure if this means 'resilience' or, rather, 'tenacity'. Resilience implies a return to a previous and better state; tenacity is the characteristic of defiantly persevering. For most post-earthquake people, there is no going back, only going on.

As a result of these depictions, many non-Haitians think that the Haitians lack sensitivity: after all, 300,000 died beneath the rubble – shouldn't there have been a longer period of mourning? They seem to forget that, despite the dead, over 1.5 million found themselves, overnight, without a roof over their heads. Today, close to half a million are still without lodging, while it is safe to

say that a good half a million and more must live in what can be described as 'sub-standard' in all possible ways. How would any of us keep on in the midst of a similar tragedy? Love has many faces. One of them is perseverance against all odds, holding in one's personal grief so as to put on a brave face for others, and survive hand in hand.

I watch people ask questions only to be greeted by a dismissive nod of the head, like a clam snapping down its shell for protection. One night, my uncle wants to show me the photos of a villa by the sea on his camera. He is stopped short by the hundreds, if not thousands, of images that he has yet to download, one year later after the earthquake, onto the hard-drive of his computer. "Look," he says, "here's a dead person," and pointing, "here's another. Dead everywhere." He is showing me, photo after photo, what he witnessed as he barreled through the streets. "See," he continues, "Look," witnessing along with him. "There, and there," one tumbled building after another, one nameless corpse after another. "Look," he says, and what he really means is, "don't look away, don't look away. Look what I am showing you." And I don't. He doesn't cry. He doesn't explain. He just turns an image after the other, for what seems an eternity, as if showing me the film that makes up the memory in his mind, indelible images of the implausible.

When I am in Haiti, parts of my family that never converge visit one another. Some have not seen each other for years, even though they live close by, all in the capital. Over dinner, over drinks, gradually, and in the absence of questions, the stories emerge, describing where each of them was when the thundering sound started. Many begin by speaking of a sound they could not identify, like a cannon or a deployed academic weapon. They describe how, a few seconds later, the ground buckled beneath them, how the solid ground suddenly became undulating like an ocean wave, how their bodies shook, what they held on to, if there was anything to hold to. Some prayed while literally holding up the beams of a door jamb. They all thought it would never end.

In my post-earthquake returns, what I have learned is that it is in these moments, freed from the pressure of voyeuristic expectations, that the stories emerge, spill out, are told and retold in intimate details. There are, of course, exceptions, or unexpected confessions. My elderly uncle who found himself at ground zero in the capital, and who returned to Berthé to find the apartment building he had himself designed and built, intact, refuses to engage in any conversation about the earthquake. He only says that he doesn't believe that things are as bad as they say, while his best friend, twenty years younger than him, a baker, spends every day distributing bread wherever needed. This uncle has suddenly turned conservative, blaming those who perished and those struggling under the tents for their lack of foresight. His mental and physical health is deteriorating; yet no one suggests that his sudden shift in point of view is a reaction to what he lived and witnessed during those few seconds and that first night of which he never speaks, at least, not to me – a post-traumatic response of denial and dissemblance.

A story circulates of a cousin who seems to have lost touch with reality. Every morning he dresses for work, descends into the worse hit areas of the city, and returns home every evening. No one knows what he is doing. Why bother dress for work in these days? A year ago, that cousin gave me a tour of the city, pointing out at various sites, going by the disassembled sprawl of the tent city that used to sit facing the broken presidential palace. It turned out that this cousin, a Haitian engineer whose constructions did not fall during the quake, was being hired by the government and by private enterprises to conduct surveys of fallen buildings. He was crawling through the debris, across the bodies of individuals who had been crushed or died in other ways, whom no rescue reached, for whom there would be no sanctified burial. He, too, does not speak of what he feels; he only describes how things were and how they are now, his finger pointing at this or that site.

A year later, an acquaintance in Jacmel who lived in the capital at the time of the earthquake, offered me a small glass of old-fashioned homemade liqueur at the end of a visit. As we sat, he spontaneously described how his two-story house fell into the ground so that he and his family found themselves eye to eye with the patio two stories below. His children were encrusted in the debris; he eventually got them out, two with severe injuries, and the group traveled on foot to Jacmel to find it similarly devastated. There is no end to the stories. Most surprising, perhaps, are the stories of those refusing to leave or leaving and returning. Despite, or because of, the post-traumatic stress the majority of people now live with, most find that the community of survivors created by the earthquake provides them with a safety net, the reassurance of not having to explain when, again and again, the physical memory of the tremors and of the shifting ground recurs, like the experience of the phantom limb. There is no escape from the past. Living with it is an uneasy accommodation – unfortunately, this is nothing new for Haitians.

To be Haitian in these times, even when one retains the memory of parents and families, even when one can remember a Haiti less despairing, is to live with the sadness of immeasurable intensity that defines one's life. It is not a lack of care or of empathy; it is like the air we breathe in daily. We carry a backward glance with which we must live. In moments of culpability, many of us would throw everything away, only to be stopped by the stern glance of a great-grandparent, in a photograph she took great pains to have taken, whose gaze speaks of the immense sacrifices undertaken to allow us to be where we are; perhaps she would not have imagined we might be outside, but at least alive, more than comfortable, with a future before us. No, that gaze cannot be betrayed. It would be the worst of betrayals.

On all the roads I travel, I walk this sadness like others walk their dogs, without complaint, because we have escaped other fates by taking the road out. I am accompanied by my ancestors, the people who always ask me, upon my arrival in

Port-au-Prince, “when are you coming back?” They are already looking at my inevitable departure, expecting me to forge something for all of us, out there, ‘elsewhere’, even if they will never meet me there. It is for this reason that you will rarely find me smiling in these faraway, unknown, and wandering roads. I keep those smiles for them, the ghosts of the pasts, those ghosts who make up my conscience.

I have left many homes over the course of my life. It often surprises me that this is not what most people do; most people stay within the restricted space of the place they were born, at least in the country of their birth. Moving from one country to another is not *pro forma*. For most people, it is not even within the scope of their imagination, except for short trips out of their comfort zones, for vacations, where comfort is sought, in a resort or a cruise ship offering what they have at home and what they don’t want to leave behind, lest they forget who they are, and become someone else, from elsewhere. It never occurs to me to ask others when they left home. I assume they have. It is a rite of passage from which very few of us can escape, even if we don’t stray far from home, or if we don’t emigrate. Still, it always surprises me to have to justify my departures and my returns from and to Haiti, as if emigrating signaled abandonment and returns, half-hearted attempts at atonement. But if atonement were in any of these movements back and forth, it would be owed not to those asking of me to justify my existence outside of Haiti; it would be owed to those who never ask me when I left Haiti, but only when will I be returning, and for how long. It would be owed to those who say, “that’s right, you never left,” and who are always glad to see me again.



Fig. 3: In Matenwa, La Gonav, 2012 © MJA Chancy. Courtesy of the artist.

Hiding in Full View: Immigration as Self-Exile*

1

* Extracts from *Good Evening,
My Name Is Anja Ortelin*,
unpublished and winner of the
2012 University of Cambridge
Lucy Cavendish College
Fiction Prize.

I am a sick woman, I'm a crazy one, and I'm a Finn. To boot.

I live in a trailer, I eat out of cans, I have no washing machine.

I've got a car, she's been with me for thirty-three years. She's the color of herring in sunshine, the side of them when they flip over in clear water.

People think I'm crazy – I can see their fingers whisking by their ears. They're the kind that wash themselves every day even though they never do anything that makes them dirty. I guess you have to wash off all them chemicals at some point, they build up, the perfumes and the softeners and the soaps. In Finland, my mother washed once a week like everyone else. Daddy warmed up the little grey sauna down the grassy path from our leaning yellow cottage, and she opened up her hair and lathered and poured buckets of water over it to rinse. When I got older, I did it for her. The last time I saw her naked body, her breasts hung down past her belly button and she said, look at them, they are *tissit* in Finnish, look at my tissit and where they've gone, and she laughed a rough laugh.

My own tissit hang heavy over the top of my belly, but they're not past the belly button mark yet.

Steny used to have names for them. Flash and Sheila, he called them, different names because they look different. Flash is all innocent and wide-eyed, hangs down lower with the nipple smack bang in the middle, like the brown eye of a doe startled. Sheila's smaller and saucier, reacts to things more, and I guess used to be more receptive with the men.

They're never coming back up again.

That night after the sauna, before mother and I walked up the evening-dewy grass path back to the cottage, we sat down for a cigarette on the wooden bench by the sauna, our feet in the chamomile. I can still hear the call of the spoonbill echoing in the deserted quiet, remember its long red legs bent the wrong way and the grey body bobbing and curtsyng.

It's the last time I saw my mother. She had already moved to her grey 1960s pre-fab apartment building then, five miles away on the outskirts of the nearest town, but she was still spending summers at the cottage.

I couldn't tolerate visiting her in the apartment. The place had beige plastic floors and plastic-covered walls and a view of the discount grocery. Sitting at her

kitchen table while she cried about being too old for any man, letting her lavish tears flow, I had to force myself to eat her disintegrating boiled potatoes and pig fat gravy, and stale sugar cookies, sliced sweetbread. She stood over me pushing more until the food started to push out of me and I had to run for the bathroom.

She wasn't used to plumbing, and there, in brown water, would be what she had expelled after her morning coffee. To save water she would hoard her offal in the toilet bowl and flush only when it was half-way full. She still only washed once a week like in the country. It never bothered me at the cottage; her smells mixing in with the breath of the winter apples in their cardboard boxes and the smoke leaking from the flames in the sooty cook stove.

I don't know what she would have wanted with a new man. It's been quite some time since there was any in my life. These days no one would go there. Who'd want to play ping pong with my two long ones. There's no burying your nose, they'd fall clear out of your way.

Sitting at my table I sometimes say out loud to the room: Ain't no hand touched this bag of skin since Nixon was President! Then I laugh, and if somebody saw me they'd think: 'crazy,' laughing at nothing. But it's not nothing, is it?

I'd guess the people here think I've got no sense of humor or any other sense. Except Neely, he seems to choose his own company more and more too. He was a wild one with his pills and booze and cowboy hats and long-haired girls in tight jeans when I first saw him, more than thirty years ago now, a big-shot record producer all the way from New Zealand on extended vacation, good-looking and reckless. Always with a group of people, clinking drinks.

I sometimes see him these days, looking at me when I'm sweeping or cleaning up at the café, and he's grinning to himself. The rest of them think I'm invisible. I got what I wanted.

It's true I'm quiet and don't say much, or to be specific, I say nothing at all, but I'm not confused about the nature of reality. I don't have much time for the world of people is all, but I talk all day long, and not to myself either, just *inside* myself. I've always found me the best company.

Sometimes even I wonder how I've been able to spend all these years 'alone'. A dreamer can, a consumer of memories. Or someone who lives in the moment.

There is a long tradition of hermits in Finland. What we sense, smell and intuit of one another, without talking; I have words with all the creatures I cross paths with everyday, starting from whatever monster I find in the sink when I get up in the morning. Walking down the streets, the shiny-black crackles (yes, I know they're really grackles, but they don't grackle, they crackle) know me well and screech hello when I pass, and I screech and crackle right back if there's no one around.

Some of the happiest-looking people I see around here keep company with animals. Give me a good dog any day over some male scratching himself in front of the TV or on my bed, night after night. Christ.

There's an insect thigh on the table cloth next to my coffee cup from this morning, the one with butterflies on it. I've already got up to murder five or six big black

flies that crawled out of nowhere and roosted on my windowsill. One broke with blood on the wood of the sill.

The radio says there will be a storm. I've lit the Catholic candles, though with the door open, the bugs keep swarming in. I need a mosquito net, but I've needed one for so many years now that I'm used to the bugs, and most of them don't do much, won't bite. I've locked eyes with a lot of crickets and cicadas sitting on my sleeve or lunch plate. They stare at you from across light years of knowledge and understanding, like they just dropped off from another planet. Some bugs are almost like company, frittering their wings as they hover over the glass cylinder trying to decide whether to take the plunge to the flame.

The gusts are already cooling at the edges, and I can feel the cold front approaching.

The big water bugs though I have to murder, I can't help it, I bash them to death with whatever's handy. Some trouble with the centipedes too. Or millipedes? What's the difference.

Big honky-tonk noises from the Plankton, yells and whoops. It's like a distant companion. Sunday evenings, when the bar is quiet, it's almost too desolate.

I was having my weekly cocktails there on Tuesday night when the TV started showing one of those beauty pageants for toddlers, where they put make-up on kids and cinch their waists and drape them in pink lace. It shouldn't be legal, parading their little bodies and making the girls up to look like miniature blow-up dolls, barely out of their diapers. I almost left my drink half drunk and Six Days on the Road on the jukebox, but Rose changed the channel.

I still would've left if that partner in the beat-up hat hadn't done it first. That man has killed. It's all over him. Kept looking at me.

I went back today to pick up a pizza, and maybe to see if he was there still. He wasn't. Ate the pizza, the whole thing. Soon I can't go, spring break starts next week.

They do break the spring, to pieces.

The sun keeps coming out and lighting up the sea, all frappé and restless behind the dunes. Used to be I could see it sitting down, but there's too many shrubs and plant life taken over the vacant lots between me and the sea, so now I have to stand up to catch a glimpse. It's rough, weedy country. If you venture out into the green-looking parts, you're liable to step on a sand rat, snake or tarantula, and be picking sticker burrs off your clothes for the next half hour.

I'm not complaining. Elsewhere on the island the pink and lavender condo houses are taking over, the Trump Towers of Texas, to be whacked into splinters in the next hurricane. Some developer could still take the sea away from me, and then it'd be just me and the dogs in the kennel next door, fenced in and no view. Barking.

Could still happen. Hope I don't live long enough to see it.

It's four-thirty in the morning, but there is no sleeping through this uproar – the metal roof is growling like the devil and the house is shivering and shaking like the north's gonna take it south clear across the dunes, and onward. Even when the gusts calm for a moment, the wind never stops whistling in the wires.

When I woke up the first thing I thought of was the picture Grandmother gave me before she died, the one that every child in Finland gets, of a guardian angel hovering over a girl and a boy crossing a ravine. They're lost and frightened, their eyes and mouths forming little o's. In my dream I was on the road again, sitting in my car in the dark, in the middle of a big empty parking lot. Used to have that picture pinned up on the visor.

So tired I see specks and ghosts. I am lonely, isolated, on the loose when I wake up like this.

I don't know why I kept that picture after leaving New York, even though I kept almost nothing else. *As I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for the Lord is my shepherd.* But I never really believed it, not even when we were driving around Manhattan with our megaphones and our flowers for peace. It might have been better to believe, but if you don't, you don't. Once you know something, you know it, and once you see, you can't help but see.

The Catholic candles are sputtering with cooked insects and bad manufacturing. Bought them at the New Family Grocery. New because it now sells the seashells that people no longer have the patience to discover for themselves on the beach, and instead buy in bags imported from China. Also sells curls of Texas bullshit, exported to China, it said in the paper. Every time I walk past the place, I think: what's so 'family' about you? America is real good at calling things family this and family that, as if there were other groceries for people with none, or who're down and out, or just happen to hate their own folks' guts. Where are those of us supposed to shop who don't have a family? It's only half of this town that's made up of Christian families in their neat little houses and standard lawns and landscaping, but the Grocery is the only grocery in town and it's for every deckhand, hobo, alcoholic, junkie, tourist and vet.

Families: the kind of people with console tables. The rest of us are a ragged collection, families of people and their cats, a man and his dog, deckhand and barmaid, a man and his paintings, a woman and her memories.

Those years on the road are a strange vision in my memory now, the deep dark of the American night. Parked outside some deserted shopping mall, rain flowing down the sides of my car, wondering what Steny would think if he knew where I was, if he saw me through the glass lit by the distant, diluted light of a street lamp, behind the slow dance of dissolving rivulets on the window. Or what my mother would think if she saw me looking so much like her – pale faced and clutching a bottle to my lips like a baby.

In the first months on the road I still longed for Steny sometimes, but I'd always known I'd lose him eventually. I was just a pantyhose model, I was never going to be Ingrid Bergman. Maybe knowing I'd lose him was why I wanted him so bad, why he had such a pull on my loins even through the rain of a thousand miles. He came with the danger of loss, the sweetest threat.

I don't remember much about the end times in New York though. The drugs, yes, the amphetamines, the weed, the LSD. Steny thought amphetamines would

do me good. Vietnam, civil rights, women's lib all passed me by while I sat in bars or in some other haze. I only read about the peace march past the White House. I wasn't even an onlooker, I just wasn't looking.

Alcoholic memories are not like other memories. They're not real, they're *unreal*, like dreams, distant hallucinations of *someone else's* life.

On the road the days were long and timeless, and I had no plan. I'd follow another car, or an unusual-looking cloud. I didn't check the road signs much, and often found out 'where' I was from the newspapers after I'd stopped for the night at some bar. Romeville or Littleton or Rockville, they could've been anywhere. It was like traveling in space.

I didn't have a lot of belongings left, a few random things, a handful of pictures. But I still looked like something back then, and you couldn't disappear properly if you were looking too good. It took a while to dowdy-down, but I adapted to my circumstances, like an animal that uses coloration to camouflage itself. I learned to blend in so that the men no longer came at me with their stories about themselves, talking my ear off. Peacocks have feathers, men have words, they gun ahead and try to tell you everything they do, only here and there throwing you a snippet of a question, like a peanut to a monkey.

"Those sure are shiny – your ear rings," one said to me in a roadside bar somewhere in the Midwest. I went to the restroom and threw them in the garbage.

Whenever those big-talking men saw I was fixing to leave them empty-handed, at the bar, they'd say things like,

"Oh now, I'm all broken up about you leaving, baby."

"You could come over, hon, and we could fire up the grill. I've got a sirloin this big!" – I remember one man holding up his hands showing something the size of a bread loaf.

I got good at picking the kind of places where you'd be left alone – a local bar that seemed unpopular and half-forgotten. I'd look at the number and type of cars parked outside: more than five, it was too full. All trucks, too risky. I took in the distance of the establishment from a nearby town. If it was too far down the highway from houses where people lived, too illicit. It had to be close but not in town. I liked the places traveling salesmen liked. They were like me, drifting across the map.

Mostly I don't remember, but a few places I do. Like Oklahoma. I remember scanning the license plates outside with my engine still running: Oklahoma, Oklahoma, Minnesota, Oklahoma. Two of the Oklahomas were trucks, but one had a pendant in the window from a middle school and a flatbed full of lumber and tools. The other truck was washed clean, and the two regular cars seemed normal, so I turned off my engine.

Inside it was four men and a woman sitting at the bar watching TV. It was late evening already and the TV had a movie on they were all watching, including the bartender. He walked backwards to me and I thought that was a good sign – it wasn't a high-risk kind of place if the bartender could have his back to the door when a new customer came in.

When he turned, he was young and smooth and slim faced, younger than me. “What can I get you, ma’am?”

“Whiskey, straight.”

He asked if I wanted water. Yes, I said, and watched him as he made the drink, slow and deliberate, like a ritual, or some kind of mating dance. It was beats off a regular person’s regular movements. He turned around in that same measured way and put the two glasses down in front of me. He smelled so clean, ringlets of brown hair hanging over his ears, eyes dark and alive.

When the movie ended and everyone started leaving, I got up too, but he walked over to me.

“Another drink before I close up?” Those eyes.

“I think –”

He said: “Don’t” and touched my hand so lightly and I don’t know why I stayed that last night, in his small cot in a backroom with no window. Early in the morning I slipped out before he woke up and took my empty whiskey glass sitting on the bar top. I still have it.

I forgot Finland too during those years. Childhood? A forgotten place. I was eliminating all the other memories, too, all because of the one nightmare one. A frightened little face, a little hand gripping mine like a vice, almost not being able to do it, the blue van next to the airline terminal being emptied of suitcases, the large family huddled on the walkway, in our way. Small hands wrapped around tiny ears when a plane took off, thundering. And then.

Then I went to the car. There was a ticket on the windshield.

Maybe I should be afraid of the memories now, but I am not. I’ve tested the waters of remembrance with less dangerous forms of pain. Mother, father, Finland. I am forever climbing up our old hill from the sauna to the leaning yellow cottage. I follow the path strewn with fallen leaves, and wet, they cling to my bare knees as I climb up the mountain that is my journey.

Thinking of Steny all that happens now is that I remember him, but he has no hold over me. He used to make me so crazy, so blind. I guess it’s what we call love. I’d never been in love, so I didn’t know it was only a form of insanity.

His bosses had egged him on, those sharks, sent him to Scandinavia: *Find us a Nordic beauty, like that Bergman girl! You’re young, you’re ambitious, you got no family!* He was just the kind of dark handsome stranger who could get a girl to leave hearth and home. I’m what he brought back.

Early on when he first took me to his mother’s house in Dallas I had no idea what went on behind those sparkling exteriors of big American homes, or that it was just another version of what had gone on in my own childhood. The Dallas version was gin-and-tonic and soap-opera afternoons while the kids played outside with the nanny. The Finnish version was less pretty. For all his Americanness, even Steny had no idea what went on in America. He never thought about it, he never even went to the grocery store, took the train,

worried about who did his laundry. The big car, big house, big job combo he swallowed whole.

Steny's mother Cora-Ann was a brittle old bitch. I would have never made it through those fifteen months without Bella next door. She rang the doorbell one morning after Cora-Ann had gone to some charity to-do, stood there with her long brown hair hanging straight down – *one of those hippies from California*, Steny's mother had said about her – holding out a cake. Bella said it was angel food, and I wondered what that was, but it sounded promising. She invited me over for a “refreshment,” and that afternoon when I sat down at her lime-green kitchen table in her lime-green kitchen, the refreshment turned out to be a gin and tonic.

She was my angel, answered questions I couldn't ask anyone else, words, things, foods, customs. What's a rosary, after Steny laughed himself sick when I came home with one, presenting it to him as a necklace. It was only years afterward that I understood why that had been funny. There were almost no Catholics in Finland, so how was I to know, I'd never been anywhere or known anyone outside of my hometown or my small circle of acquaintances in Helsinki. It was years till I realized why it was funny to make that kind of mistake, and close to decades to actually *think* it was funny.

Steny was furious when he found out I was pregnant, right before a trip we were supposed to take together to Hollywood. It was the big party where I was supposed to be introduced for the first time – he called it a soft launch. It was meant to be the start of my film career and he had booked a calendar full of meetings and parties. No auditions yet. He said I wasn't ready, he said next year, when my accent was better.

He said get rid of the baby. He railed like it was my fault, like he'd had nothing to do with it. But it wasn't until he started calling from New York to tell me I shouldn't talk to any reporters about it that I thought he was a little delusional. There hadn't been any reporters from Finland for a year.

We fought every time he came home to Dallas for the weekend. I said who cared, really, about me being pregnant, it wouldn't be long till I was presentable again, and he screamed: “Time is money!”

I'm grateful to him for making me learn English. It didn't hurt that I wanted to prove Cora-Ann wrong, come hell or hot water, like I used to say. Thanks to Cora-Ann and Steny I got better at English through arguing – it's the best language training you could ever have.

Bella and everybody in Dallas used to ask me all the time why I left. All immigrants are asked to answer that – why did you come, why are you here? Some come for money, or for family, or to escape something that was after them, others because they couldn't think of anything else. The official story is that I came for love.

A better question to ask would be: Why did you stay?

The answer: my skin feels at home here.

For many people a place is like a person. For a person who is on the run, a chosen place is a refuge and a friend. Perhaps the only one. In this tucked-away place, this

back-ass, miserable little Texas town, the only glorious and lively things about it are the parts that people aren't responsible for: the sea and the sky. The beauty is that no one even knows anymore that I came here from someplace in the first place.

Walking down the street, everyone here has his or her own relationship to it, loving it, despairing of it, dismissing it, unable to see it. One person delights in the dandelion squeezing through a crack in the old sidewalk, another bends down and yanks the plant out of its nest and flings it into the nearest garbage can.

At the New Family Grocery I often think I'm more American than you are. I love this country more than you ever could. You just don't know better. You live here in ignorance.

Texans, they think of themselves as Americans, sure, but what they think is that they're the only authentic Americans, the rest are Yankees, immigrants, hillbillies or New Yorkers. You can see why, in a way, even geographically: the shape of Texas on the map gives shape to the whole country: it's the udder to the big cow. Without Texas, America would look like a pork chop.

Whatever else America is, regardless of how much hope it seems to offer, for most people, original or immigrant, it is the end of the line. Most who come, stay. It never occurred to me to go out and see if there was something better out there in the world – like everyone else, I had already started taking America for granted. It only occurred to me to go to a different place *in* America.

Why did I stay in Port A?

Because it had no mirrors. No public bathrooms, no shopping malls, no shop windows, no city streets, no hotels, no hallway mirrors in people's houses, because I never went to any. No restaurants with mirrors when you entered. No wall mirrors anywhere. The only places that had any were bar restrooms – easy to avoid, usually too high up, scummy or worn from decades of wiping down.

Because this is the kind of place where, if you're walking down the sidewalk with a grocery bag, someone will stop and ask if you need a ride. Not that I want one.

Though it's also the kind of place where if you're a woman walking down the street at night, someone in a big white pickup will roll down his window, taking with it the reflection of neon and the night, and ask, You going a long way, honey? And then it's a different kind of friendliness.

A few tried that on me in the beginning. I never got in, said nothing, couldn't, and the cowboys gave up. But even so, no one turned unfriendly. They've let me be. In the South, people may hate you behind closed doors, but they're not likely to let it show as brazenly as in New York. Texans rarely turn up their noses when they're faced with something they don't understand or approve of. They're good at pretending.

I stayed because on this island, spring is only absent in summer. Even in February the air smells like there's something nice in the oven in the house next door, a distant promise. When the air parts like that, like it did earlier today, and the balmy breeze begins to leak in, you realize you haven't smelled it in a long time, and it is a sweet reminder of sunshine and still heat in windless corners, the dead silence of a heat wave.

I stayed because of the wind that the sea sends from the other side of the world, laced with the fragrance of sweaty sailors on ships, baskets and bushels of oranges and pineapple in big shipping crates, men on oil rigs, the smell of the dead things of the sea, its smell of wonderful rot, and the sounds and splashes of dolphins and other sea creatures.

I stayed because of the sea. I don't mind the sea looking back at me. It glistens and glares sometimes, other times it's unclear, soft-surfaced. I don't mind it lapping at my ankles, reaching higher up my legs, going into every nook and cranny of my shell.

She, the sea, is the only one who's seen all of me. The only reflective surface I can stand.

I stayed because the grackles whistle as I pass – *whheewww!* – *baby, look at you walking by* – *tsk tsk tsk*.

And because here every day is erased, the counter reset.

2

At seven in the evening the front room of the weathered trailer was darkened by the tall poppies swinging in front of the living-room window.

The trailer sat high on a blustery sand dune, and when she let go of the door to reach for the lamp, the wind from the Gulf heaved it back against the frame with a clap.

She found the switch for the table lamp, turned on the transistor radio and latched the flimsy aluminum door with its scratched plastic window behind her, wiping off the sheen of sweat on her forehead. The wind howled and she could hear the electrical wire dragging across the roof with the sound of a big cat scratching slowly.

First she went down the few feet of hallway to the unused bedroom at the back and cracked the miniature door to quickly look in and make sure that nothing dangerous lurked within. Through the wall, across the five or six feet of tangled brush that separated her trailer from the shipping container housing the vet's office, she could already hear the thump of music. Shelley, the vet's assistant had come by for her nightly check and had switched on the Corpus Christi dance music station.

Carmen had heard her at the café explaining to people that the electro-pop and the human voices of the DJs calmed and comforted the dogs at night. Carmen knew otherwise: the dogs baying in tune with certain dance numbers were the biggest reason she had long ago abandoned use of the bedroom.

Back in the living room she removed her sunglasses, baseball cap and shoes and stood on the creaky floor in her shapeless, long-sleeved blue dress. Her bent head a nest of overgrown strands, she peeled off the long-johns underneath the dress, delicately, without removing the dress, and then slipped her arms out inside the dress to remove the undershirt over her head through the neck.

She sighed in relief and looked around the little room where all of her daily activities were concentrated: the cavernous Indian print-covered couch, the red-top

Formica kitchen table, the two metal-back chairs, the tiny nook of kitchen. The room was bathed in green from all the vegetation surrounding the trailer.

She opened the front door again – even with the wind gusts it was too hot in the metal box of the trailer. It let out onto a small, drooping porch set on top of concrete roadblocks. A gecko sunned itself on one of the rotting one-by-fours, catching a last triangle of sunlight.

– Hello friend, she said.

Elsewhere dusk usually conjured up a cooling down, an easing off of the stark light and burning heat of the day. Not so in Texas, where dusk was dense with an after-burn. She stood in the vast maritime hum of the outdoors, with nothing to look back at her but the sky, her silhouette framed in the doorway by the electric light behind, facing a sea of reeds that gradually darkened as they receded toward the fore dunes. She held in her hands the transistor radio which she had picked up from the table, the cord straining behind her, playing a song she knew by heart. The wind washed against her face in deliberate waves, died for a moment, then rose to greater intensity until it hardly ceased at all and the poppies whipped frantically against the tin side of her trailer. She turned up the volume as the wind mounted, letting it swell as the air swelled until *There's an old flame burning in your eyes* evaporated into the wind and only shreds of sound could be heard intermittently through the din of the tropical storm.

She was rooted in the doorway as gusts transformed the landscape and something inside the trailer toppled. Not even when there was a loud crash behind her did she turn back, not even when the wind began to slash rude drops of water across her face, and even when the front of her was soaked in the space of a few seconds she kept her face turned up to the sky.

This would have been the only chance to catch the famous smile, but no one was looking.

Holocaust in My Mind*

* For an intense cinematographic rendering of this issue see *Grbavica* (dir. Jasmila Žbanić, Bosnia and Herzegovina/Croatia/Austria/Germany 2006).
[Editors' Note]

In 1992 thousands of Muslim women, particularly from Bosnia, were victims of systematic rape by the Serbian Security Forces. Sexual violence was inflicted upon them because of their ethnicity and gender, and it brought to light how systematic rape can be used as a tool for ethnic cleansing, based on gender. It was also a desperate measure to raise Serbian children.

Bosnian women were raped and tortured by Serbian soldiers as part of their attempt to eradicate Bosnian roots. It is estimated that the number of women being raped ranged from 2,400 to 20,000. Victims were raped more than once every day, whilst others were forced to witness the rape of other women, and to endure physical torture. Rapes resulted in unwanted pregnancies, and most women desperately wanted to abort. There is no exact record of how many abortions were arranged and performed in those days, but estimates indicate that from 10 to 1,000 women delivered the children of the rapists. Figures may further escalate, considering that many women hide their rapes. Others decided to keep the babies, without escaping the depression and the effects caused by the trauma as a result of what they endured. The women who decided to accept the children, still, found it hard to love them and, at times, pretended that the children did not exist.

In the former Yugoslavia, the war led to millions of refugees and displaced persons, and the majority of them were women. The survivors faced constant trauma, loss of homes and of family members, and physical injuries. The chances of psychological recovery were – and still are – remote, and the women survivors, continuing to relive their trauma, are still suffering from long term post-traumatic stress disorder.

In spite of this, women came forward to testify to and recount their experiences. As a result, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia became the first tribunal to prosecute war rape as a crime against humanity. Based on several testimonies, the Tribunal named twenty-one individuals responsible for the crimes, including, among the perpetrators, General Ratko Mladić and Radovan Karadžić, the leader of Bosnia Serb, the self-declared government.

The reality is that women survivors are still experiencing anxiety, sexually transmitted diseases, and physical illness. On the 11th of April 2012, Amnesty International declared that hundreds of women continue to live with the effects of rape and other forms of torture, without access to medical, psychological and financial assistance which is necessary to rebuild their lives. Amnesty International added that, out of thousands of documented cases of crimes of sexual violence, only a few perpetrators have been prosecuted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague, or by the Bosnian domestic courts. Two years ago, after persistent pressure by local and international civil society groups, the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina developed a national programme for the female victims of sexual violence. The programme has not been finalised or adopted.

Women have been waiting in the silence of their memories.

They cannot wait any longer.

*They come for me.
And my tears drown in silence,
My stories buried within.
Steps ravaging my body.
For war has torn me apart.
Now I belong to nowhere.*

As the night settles in, and the curtain of the day fades, the crowd disappears into the void. Silence is what comes after, and it is when the noises hammer in my ears like endless drums. The noise never stops; the footsteps follow one after the other. In the stillness of the night, they come back, and I hate them as much as I hate this life.

My name is Mirka, and I have come a long way, surviving the war in Bosnia and what it brings with it. Now, it seems that a part of me is coping with life. I have a job, a home, and a son! The other part of me is wandering somewhere in a space which is unknown to me. Only the light of the moon, attempting to enter my window, knows my story and shares my grief.

For, deep within me, lies a dormant monster hating me and hating my son who is soundly asleep, unaware of the life around him. I watch a programme on television; at times I follow it; at other times, my mind wanders into places that I do not recognize. I do not even recognize the pale woman with sad and dark eyes. She does not resemble me, though she pertains to my self. My thoughts, and the worlds conjured up in my mind, are suddenly interrupted by the voice of Joshua, my son.

“Mama, mama.”

His soft voice brings me back to the real world in the room, and I make my way towards his bedroom. A loving child with golden curls, different from my raven black hair, Joshua looks at me with tears streaming on his tender cheeks.

“Mama, I had a bad dream.”

He is my bad dream, I think, but I dare not reveal that to him. Joshua is innocent, and, though not conceived out of love, I brought him up and loved him.

“It is ok, my dear,” I utter softly, and hug him tightly, the warmth of motherhood running through my veins.

Still, when I look into his eyes, which are blue as the sea reflecting freckles of crystals, I get another view. My son is beautiful, like an angel, I tell myself, but, all at once, his face changes and he becomes someone else. Another man looks at me, piercing me and transporting me back in time. My breath turns heavy and, like a thunder, I see myself in utter darkness, if not for the dim light in the room. His footsteps come closer, hammering in my ears, causing me pain and discomfort. Instantly, I realize that it is him as he comes closer and looks into my eyes. The Serb soldier. He takes me as his prey, and attacks me, as he usually does, till his seed is implanted deep within me.

His child is here.

“Mama, I dreamt of papa,” my son says.

“Yes, tell me,” I say half-heartedly.

“I saw him being killed in war. Tell me about him. What does he look like?”

Tears are flooding my eyes, but I lower my head to hide them. When I look at him, I see the shadows of the glittering moon shining on his innocent face.

“Joshua, your father was a great soldier, and he was handsome too,” I say, marvelling at my courage.

“He is watching you from heaven,” I lie again.

A shiver runs over my spine, and dark clouds descend upon me. This is not the truth I see into my son’s eyes. How long will this lie go on? It will go on forever till memory ebbs away. That day should not have dawned; the sun should not have risen. It would have been much better for me and for my sister, the victims of that dark day in history.

My son Joshua remains a constant memory of that night and day in 1992. He is seven years old, and, like the children of his age, he wants to know of his father. He dreams of a hero, a perfect father, and I let him live in that dream.

There are other times when I wonder and ask myself: why did I keep the seed of rage and hatred deep in my womb? Then, again, the innocent creature who was growing within me gave me strength. Joshua was there, and life went on day after day, like repetitive beats all forming one whole rhythm.

It sounded the same to me.

Joshua is doing well in school, my efforts are being fruitful. He has not asked again about his father, but his questions remain in my mind. It is afternoon, and, after finishing work, as usual, I go and pick him up. As I stand waiting for him, I watch the children coming out of the school and running towards their mothers.

It is nice to be a mother, to care each and every day for those who depend on you. My eyes fall on one of the girls who come out of the school. She smiles at me, and I smile at her, and then she walks towards a young woman with long black hair. My mind is overcrowded with thoughts transporting me back to other times, a past that I long to forget. The woman looks like my sister. My sister is no longer on earth. I suddenly find myself in her house in former Yugoslavia, now Bosnia. It was in 1992, and my sister Olena was in mourning after losing her husband in a car accident. Feeling lonely, she asked me to go and stay with her for a while. It was nice to be together again, and I accepted willingly – it was a dull moment for her and I could comfort her. The village where she lived was surrounded by countryside and high hills, and I loved its simple life. At that time, I was eighteen years old and had to look for a job; still, I could not resist going and staying with my sister. Life was peaceful there, and I was happy to be with her again, even in those dark moments. Until the war broke out and changed everything. The magnificent hills and the evergreen areas turned, without warning, into an eternal hell, and we, the women, were the direct victims who had to pay for sacrifice. It was a dispute between two territories, and it led to a senseless war, a cynical battle between two groups with one aim: grabbing as much territory as possible. Most terrifying were the measures the Serbian army used as a form of ethnic cleansing for eliminating us, the Bosnian Muslims. The soldiers were all around, until one

day they showed us what they were made of.

My story knows its origins in that dreaded day when I went shopping, as usual.

It was still daylight, and the area was safe, or at least I thought so. I put on the veil and went out, as that evening I was cooking a treat for my sister. I had been walking for ten minutes when a car stopped, and, looking back, I saw it was the soldiers. I kept on walking, ignoring them, trying to avoid them. We had heard a lot about the Serbs, but I could never have imagined they could go so far. Their car stopped exactly at the point where I was walking, and two soldiers came out and started following me. I kept on walking, but they were faster than me, and, before I could utter a word, they were all around me. It was them, the soldiers. Panic seized me; my mind became overcrowded by thoughts. I tried to figure out if I had done something wrong, but it had nothing to do with that: it had to do with me being a woman from Bosnia. One of the soldiers grabbed me and took off my veil, already humiliating me, a Muslim woman. With his hands, he stroked my cheeks, "What do you want?" I asked him, full of consternation.

He did not answer; he moved closer and threw me on the ground. I tried hard to release myself from his grip, but in vain because he was much stronger than I was. He covered my mouth and, with the other hand, went through my garments looking for my thighs. I cried, but I instinctively knew what was coming next, what he was up to, what he was going to do with me. He was lying over my body; I could feel something on my thighs. I had never been touched by a man and did not know what it meant. We were always taught that a woman is touched only by the one who loves her, before the eyes of God.

It was not so, and I would have preferred death.

The soldier went on forcing himself upon me, and violating me. It was painful, but it did not end there; more was to come. I made an effort to move, but he did not let me. More soldiers came down, and, one after the other, took their turn in raping me, fiercely, one after the other. Their laughter echoed in the air, and I heard one of them murmuring, "She is virgin, and we do not get them everyday." I can hear his voice now. I heard another one saying loudly, "You will raise your bastard as a Serb." The men laughed loudly, and left me alone on the ground.

It was hard to stand the pain. More painful was that, for a Muslim woman, virtue is of utmost importance. I felt humiliated, deprived of dignity, and just wanted to die. Still, there was my sister whom I adored, and she was waiting for me.

But, when I got home, a horrible scene was waiting for me, which stays engraved in my mind. A car was parked near my sister's house. I recognised it at once, and a shiver ran over my spine as it dawned upon me that the soldiers had been there. No, it could not be. My feet felt clumsy, but I plucked up my courage and walked into the house. There I felt the greatest shock of my life, witnessing the most horrifying scene before my eyes. It was far worse than rape. I could not believe what my eyes were seeing: on the cold ground, my sister was lying in a pool, drowned in blood, whilst a Serb soldier was adjusting his trousers. I felt like fainting, but my paralyzed feet kept on, firmly stuck on the ground.

There I stood, motionless, staring, dazed as if an alien. I could not register that my sister was lying there, lifeless. I felt sick, terribly sick, and fell on my beloved sister's body. In the flash of a second, the vision of our childhood came before my eyes, the days when we played together; unaware of what would befall us, later in life.

I suddenly felt some arms taking me away from the corpse. "No, no," I sobbed, for I wanted to remain with my sister, die with her. Still, more was waiting for me. They were taking me away, and I looked at the one who was gripping my hands. I shuddered. He was a soldier; I still remember his gaze. His squinting eyes were penetrating, piercing my heart like daggers as he dragged me by hand and forced me to walk. "Where are you taking me?" I asked one of the men. "You will soon get there, sweet."

Devastated and wretched as I was, I did not dare utter a word for fear of being raped again. The soldiers were huge, and looked hard, and I did not want to go through the same experience. Yet, I was heading to the same experience. I kept on walking, barefooted, but the rough ground did not damage me as much as before. I thought of my sister lying in cold blood and of the soldier near her. It was so hard to bear that I kept on walking and walking, hoping to cancel the scene. My mind was wandering, but it kept coming back to torment me, even though my soul had left me and, perhaps, altogether, life.

They ordered me to stop, and when we stopped near another village, more women joined me. We looked at each other, as if acknowledging the pain and despair with our eyes, but we could not talk. It was easy to grasp the truth behind their harrowed expressions, so full of grief: they had been through the same act of violence.

We were merely lost souls, walking and walking away from our homes, which had once warmed our hearts, and from our families. It took long hours of walking till we arrived at destination. The area was isolated except for some large buildings and the countryside surrounding it. We were forced into a large building. We were led into a hall, only with beds. Other women were sitting there, and they all stared at us, with the same appalled looks. I could see no life in their eyes; it had been taken from them. These women were waiting for death to relieve them from hell. I was soon to become like them.

Now that my sister was gone, and my honour defaced, there was nothing left to live for. Most of the women were pregnant, in advanced pregnancy or at its beginning. For a moment, I felt as if I had been driven into a dark abyss of no return.

There was a woman sitting alone on a bench, and I approached her. She must have been in her late forties: her dark eyes had deep circles around them; her cheeks were slanted and firm, revealing beautiful high cheekbones. She introduced herself as Marie. She looked at me and said in a low voice: "It would have been better for you if you had died, my child." In that horrid darkness, I thought of my sister. What a way to die! But it was better than the martyrdom waiting for us. Yet Marie was right, for what was to follow was far worse than death. Looking back, I

say I would have preferred to go along the death flow, rather than going through the events that followed. Certainly, the hands of God were with me, constantly.

The so-called camps were under the responsibility of the Serbs and, later on, I learned the reason why I was taken there. These camps consisted of stores, empty factories and old schools, and all served the purpose: to accommodate the Serbian soldiers, in their tasks of eliminating the Bosnians by raping their women. It was my turn. A man in his late thirties, wearing a uniform, took me by the hand. "What do you want from me?" I asked him. He grabbed me and threw me on the floor. A sudden prickle ran all over my spine for I could tell what was coming. They were going to rape me again, and his voice pierced my heart.

"Open your legs!" he said in a loud voice, as usual, using hard and cold words. I tried to resist, but he untied his trousers and came closer. I fell onto the ground, and he was all over me. His filthy body was penetrating me, and it was a searing pain. While he was raping me, another officer entered the room. I took a deep breath and sighed in relief as I thought they were going to stop. But hell was not going to end; it was only the change from one soldier to another. The nightmare had no end, for the other officer took down his pants and raped me. There was no escape. I closed my eyes and drifted into the world of unconsciousness. Opening my eyes again, I found myself in a dark and filthy room. There was no one, and it all came back to me: the scenes, the officers, the pain... From the other room, I could hear screams of the women who, like me, were being raped and violated. Of all ages. What were they taking from us?

One after the other, the women came into the room, and only the walls can recall the tears we shed in silence. In the darkness and stillness we had forgotten the meaning of being women. With each new day, we hoped it would come to an end. It did not. We were raped by the military Serbs every day, no women escaping their barbaric lust. Most of the time they kept telling us they were following orders, that the reason behind their actions was to humiliate us and make us lose our honour – because we were Muslims.

Most of us were virgins at the time of rape, giving away their innocence to these savages. For us, moral shame was the deepest wound; premarital sex was prohibited, yet they came and took it away. I gave my innocence to someone who did not love me – not a man, but a savage.

My eyes are full of tears now.

"Mama, mama..."

Joshua's voice echoes in my ears, and I hug him.

"How was your day, my dear?" I ask him.

"We had maths today," he replied.

"Oh, I know you do not like maths."

"No."

"Maths is important whether you like it or not. What we do not like is what is most good for us." Of course he does not understand. Joshua hates mathematics,

and he has taken this from me. At school I hated mathematics, but the subject is important and he has to study it, as I did. It resembles my experience very much, I hated it but I had to go through it, making me relive memories that never desert me.

Time flies away, almost ten years have passed from that nightmare, but in my mind it seems it is happening everyday. Memories are crystal clear, and, day after day, they live within me almost to the point of becoming part of me. Joshua is rapidly growing up, and I love him more than anything in my life. He is the only remaining thing, and, yes, one day, he will study and graduate; he will be the gentleman that the one who conceived him was not.

It was a bleak day when I found out I was carrying him. That day dawned like the others before it, but darker than the others. One day I noticed my periods had stopped, and it was not due to shock but to the repetitive rape by the monsters. My belly was expanding, and it was not due to overeating – we ate very little – and along came the nausea, the illness, and an instinctive feeling which warned me deeply: I was pregnant. Being raped is a nightmare, but carrying an unwanted seed is a grave reality.

I hated to look in the broken glass serving as a mirror in our hall. That woman annoyed me, and I did all I could to evade her gaze. She was constantly there, haunting me, living deep within me. Who was the father? Who could tell? It was not easy to tell, as there were many savages who brutally raped and ravaged me, for how many times I dread to recall.

Yet, deep inside of me, there was a new life, a child who was innocent. Yes, innocent, and unaware of how he was introduced to the world, and in need of protection.

We remained in the camp for days, even months, and there was no doubt about my situation: I was with child. Being pregnant, however, did not alter our situation, still subjected to rape. The soldiers went on raping and raping, turning into fierce animals; it would be better to describe them as ‘demons’. In my memory there is a horrid scene that will never leave me, of a pregnant woman in her eighth month. I saw the soldiers raping her one after the other, until she was exhausted, until she could not breathe any more. But what could we do? Confronted with situations like this, we were helpless.

There was little hope in our heart, and, at every new dawn, we hoped it would be over, but it was not. The only comfort and strength we could find was in our own company. Affinity in tragedy kept us together, and love and solidarity between us kept us going. We lived day by day, breathing on, every one of us praying and longing our souls would travel with the night. Our prayers were not answered.

One fine day it was again my turn. I went for a walk, away from the filthy smells of rape, away from the place haunting me. I was walking, and a soldier was walking behind me. Even in broad daylight, these men without scruples attempted to rape us in all situations. He grabbed me. I could not tell which one of them it was, for

every time there were new ones. Rape had become a daily part of life, shattering our hopes and making us immune to everything. I tried to escape, but he seized me. He brought out a knife and put it close to my throat, so close I could not breathe.

“Do not try to resist me!” he said in a harsh voice. I knew there was no escape. I thought of the child who was growing inside me. They could not kill me, because taking my life would take my child away, and, for the sake of my child, I let myself be raped. It did not hurt me, as rape had become a part of me, and, for the first time, there was a mission, a purpose embodied in this evil act: while he penetrated me, my sacrifice was offered to my child. There was nothing to live for, and nothing to die for. They had turned us into mad machines, breathing but not living.

Another day dawned, and, unlike the others, it did not bring about the usual rapes; it offered a ray of hope. It stopped, but it was too late for us. We were almost dead, lost and lifeless, and the harm done by the Serbs would remain in our minds and souls forever. We will always recall the silent cries in the night. It will always be there.

We were taken to see a doctor when in a state of shock and when we had infections or diseases. I decided to carry on my pregnancy. I wanted to carry my child on, even if many women in situations similar to mine asked to abort. I had lost everything, but there was this child growing inside me. Though ashamed for losing my virtues and my dignity, I wanted this child to live on.

I thought I was relieved, but, as time went by, thinking of my days in the camps, I saw the men acting like beasts. Thinking one of them was the father of my child was a thought chillingly piercing my heart. In the long nights I cried and cursed myself; still, my child had nothing to do with it. Inside me there was a new life, and all I could do was to give it protection. Carrying their seed in my womb day after day was an ordeal. There were moments when I even thought I would give birth to a monster rather than a child. I soon discarded these thoughts, and I went on.

If the worst came to the worst, I could always give my baby up to adoption. I had a choice: to abort the child and finish with it. But I was alone in the world, and I needed the child, however conceived. Also, the pregnancy was in its advanced stage, it was not right, the child would sense the pain...

And this child seemed to sense everything, and, for unknown reasons, he had decided to come into this world. Perhaps, it was the sensation of the coldness and darkness of my own experience, or because the child knew how conception had taken place. In a decision to come to the world, after long days of waiting, I gave birth to a boy.

I recall the dim light in the cold delivery room at the hospital. The pain and force of the movements are with me every night; the images of women come to my mind, to haunt me with the memory of a time when violence was used to dominate a nation, mostly through women.

It is followed by deep silence.

This is my story. Joshua is now a young man studying medicine; he will never be like his father. I will perhaps one day tell him the truth, and he will understand. Not now; so far I have succeeded, but my life is a constant torment of dark nights in turmoil, overshadowed by violence and injustice.

It will always remain there, haunting me, like discordant notes in my ears, like a holocaust. Like me, many women were in concentration camps, raped by the Serbian soldiers. Some of them could not keep their children or, when unable to abort, they gave their children up for adoption. Some women killed themselves because, as Muslims, it was too painful and shameful to commit abortion. It was, in all cases, and for all of them, a life of 'mental death', when the body survives and the trauma remains.

Running*

* Previously published in Maggie Davey, ed., *Dinaane: Short Stories by South African Women* (London: Telegram Books, 2007). © Makhosazana Xaba. Courtesy of the author and publisher.

I'm a runner. That's the role I've given myself. A sub-role, if you like. I run from the plenary room to the rooms for small groups, to prepare them. I run from these rooms to the office to fetch and deliver messages and requests. I take children from the playroom to their mothers and vice versa (there are three toddlers and one on the breast). I run to call for technical help, something we seem to need often. Even the electricity in this hotel has a mind of its own. I run from the conference venue to our makeshift office, my hotel room, when we need to replenish stock. Yesterday I ran all the way to a taxi, and we drove to the nearest chemist to get anti-allergy medication after a comrade reacted to no one knows what. The doctor said my running made a big difference.

As a team we call ourselves the AST – the 'administrative support team'. I was asked to join when a comrade fell sick. There are five of us. I feel privileged to be working with such women. Accomplished in their professions, steeped in the organisation's politics, respected, women of integrity. All of them much older than I am, in their forties and fifties. That's why I chose to do the running bit; they are not as quick on their feet as they are with their brains. I have learned so much in just a week of preparations.

This conference. Well, this conference is history in the making. As an AST, we are the mechanics. We are the oil, or the nuts and bolts of the train to liberation. We've been talking in the team about the potential historical significance of this conference. Who knows, maybe ten years from today South Africa will be free. MK, the people's army, will have struck a heavy blow to the apartheid regime, freeing the country. Freeing us all.

I suspect the leadership is hiding certain facts. Why have they started preparing a constitution? They know something we soldiers don't. Maybe freedom is closer than we can even imagine. What with all these delegations from South Africa arriving in Lusaka, holding secret meetings with our leadership and then returning home. We are on the brink of something, something significant. I can feel it.

That's the other reason I am so proud to be part of this conference. As a soldier you don't get to hear much. The camps are claustrophobic. Here in the Zambian capital, news flows. I doubt the leadership likes that.

I've become a civilian. I'm a bit conflicted by that, actually, because as a trained soldier of the people's army, I should be with the other soldiers, preparing for a military takeover. Besides, there are so few women soldiers. I love the action, the discipline, the precision, the myriad skills, the versatility. Philosophically speaking, everyone in this movement matters, everyone has a key role to play. But hey, for me, the underground army is it.

My running role at this conference is similar to my role as a soldier. But being a soldier at a women's conference is unique. I'm moving between the two pillars of

our struggle, mass political mobilisation and the armed struggle. This conference brings in another dimension, the international mobilisation, and I am a part of it. When I think of it this way, my conflict fades away.

The women of the ANC have decided to revise the draft constitution in order to make it non-sexist. That's why we are all here, one hundred and twenty of us, and only fifteen men. Seeing all these women in the flesh, in one place, made my pores sing a love song for my country. The names on the registration forms are now bodies I can touch. When I heard them introduce themselves yesterday during the opening session, I was humbled. It was a pleasant surprise to hear where they all come from, the work they do for the ANC in all those countries. With such an ocean of experience we have a right to call ourselves the 'government in waiting'.

Yesterday went much better than I expected. I ran from morning till late in the evening, but I was very disappointed by the service we got from this hotel. They are riding on the wave of long-lost fame, but I can't deal with such inefficiency. The conference venue is far from the hotel's administrative office, so I found myself running up and down to get the support we need from them.

At the end of the day, the AST came together for evaluation and prepared a summary of the day's proceedings. We smoothed out some administrative glitches by meeting with hotel management. Nomazwi, our team leader, was so direct with them, I know today will be better.

At 7:00 a.m. sharp, we arrive. The biggest room, named after President Kenneth Kaunda, is the main meeting-room for the four days of this conference. For group work we have five smaller rooms named after Zambia's colonial masters, whose claims to 'discovery' I know not.

Nomazwi is clear: "We have to ensure that the curtains are on their hooks before we draw them open for day two. That's what working behind the scenes is about." We do our work with Nomazwi's guidance. Even with the improved service, I still run a few errands before we start. When the delegates walk through the door, we are ready at our table at the back of the plenary room. The conference starts promptly at 9:00 a.m.

Today's agenda is more stimulating than yesterday's. We are getting into the content details of non-sexism. The more interesting, practical things. Yesterday we focused on contextual issues, concepts I know well. I hope I'll be able to listen to some of today's sessions. I want to listen to Comrade Lungile from Washington. Her paper, "Making Town Planning Non-sexist: A Model for the New South Africa", promises to be educational. It's the most unusual thing to choose to talk about. I'm curious. She is the first woman town planner I know.

I'm excited as we walk out for tea. Comrade Lungi is the first speaker after the tea break. When we are all back in the plenary session and Comrade Mapule, the chairperson, introduces Comrade Lungi, my anticipation heightens.

Someone taps me on the shoulder, indicating with his head I need to step outside. It's a man I know well by now, one of the hotel staff. I step out, closing the door as gently as he had opened it. Just outside the door is Comrade S'bu. He works in the Department of Information and Publicity.

"Comrade, I need to deliver an urgent message to all the conference delegates. Please tell the chairperson I need to interrupt." I notice the piece of paper in his hands. It's shaking. I look into his eyes and know that whatever it is, it's dead serious.

"Come, comrade." I usher him into the plenary room. I bend to tell Nomazwi what's happening and beckon S'bu to come with me. We walk next to each other down the middle of this plenary room to the stage where the two speakers and Comrade Mapule are sitting.

"The fourth section is on spatial concepts and processes. Here I assert that women's freedom is intricately interlinked with the physical spaces constructed around us."

Comrade Lungi flips the white cue card under the small pile in her left hand. I stare at her as I get closer to the stage. She has a black-and-white tailored suit made from kente fabric. An A-line skirt and a jacket. The white collar of her blouse reveals a slender neck, the colour of slightly toasted brown bread. As I get closer to the table, I conclude that she is beautiful. I suspect she is younger than me.

"In the fifth section, I propose options for creating safe spaces for women and for dealing with homelessness. To do this, I use examples mostly from the Scandinavian countries, where this has been achieved with varying degrees of success."

My heart beats faster, with a sense of agitation I don't understand. Walking next to Comrade S'bu is making me anxious. I wonder if Lungi has children.

"The sixth section looks at my proposal for the movement. As you can imagine, comrades, I have very strong feelings about this." She smiles as she says this. If she is disturbed by our approach, she is not showing it.

We step up the three stairs onto the stage. I whisper into Comrade Mapule's ear while Comrade S'bu stands right next to me. His left hand is now in his trouser pocket. His right hand still holds the piece of paper.

"In the last section I conclude with some crucial remarks, pointers really. Pointers I would encourage you all to take into consideration as this historic conference proceeds." Lungi looks at us, waits.

Comrade Mapule stands and addresses the delegates.

"Comrades, for those of you who have not met Comrade S'bu, he is from our Information and Publicity Department based here in Lusaka. Please pardon the interruption, he is bringing urgent news."

Comrade Mapule sits and Lungi follows suit. I squat at the end of the table. I've been squatting a lot during this conference, when it's my turn to carry the roving mike for the open discussion sessions.

Comrade S'bu approaches the podium, his right hand fisted in the air. "Amaaa-ndla!"

"Awethu," resounds in the large plenary room.

“Comrades, I will not waste your time. I know you are discussing important issues of our movement. We decided it would be folly to delay the delivery of this news. The enemy has struck. Once again, the enemy struck.”

He pauses. An uncomfortable, long pause. He looks at the piece of paper in his hand and reads from it.

“This morning we received news from home. Comrade Reverend Vukile Dladla of the Methodist Church in Edendale, near Pietermaritzburg, in Natal, was gunned down this morning at about 7:00 a.m. He was in his car. He had just finished an early morning meeting with comrades in the church. He died in the seat of his car. Five bullets were found in his body. Three were lodged in his head.”

Silence. Then voices begin to murmur. How did they get the news so fast? Damn, these comrades are impressive! My head begins to spin.

“Comrades, once again we are reminded that the struggle continues. Comrade Reverend Vukile Dladla’s death should be an inspiration to us all. His death is not in vain. His death *cannot* be in vain. The blood that was spilled this morning should remind us that the enemy is not sleeping. Aaaaa-ndla!” Comrade S’bu steps aside.

The revolutions in my head gain speed. He is my relative.

He is our relative, family.

Mama’s voice echoes in the distance.

He is the husband of my mother’s younger sister’s sister-in-law. I ask Mama what I should call him. Malume, she says.

They made a mistake with his surname. It’s Mdladlane. It’s a mistake people make frequently because Dladla is a more common surname.

After a confused pause, Comrade Mapule speaks, silencing the murmuring delegates.

“Comrades, can we all stand for a moment of silence to honour the fallen comrade.” We all rise. A yawning silence engulfs the room.

They got the surname wrong. They got the surname wrong. I become conscious again only when I hear “Aaaaa-ndla!” and the response, “Awethu.”

The delegates sit.

“Comrades, is there anyone in this room who knows the fallen comrade? Would they please say a word or two about him.”

I feel a lump in my throat. It gets larger as my mind tries to guide me. “Talk, don’t talk.” “Talk.” “Don’t talk.” Another Kaunda silence. The veins in my head are beginning to throb.

Mapule continues, now facing Comrade S’bu: “On behalf of the conference delegates, we’d like to thank you, Comrade S’bu, for bringing us the news, sad though it is. I trust that I speak on behalf of everyone in this room today. We shall never surrender. We are all in here today taking up the spear that Comrade Reverend has left. This conference is a testimony to that fact. Amandla!” Comrade S’bu lifts his right fist, firm. Then he slowly steps off the stage. He walks out of the room, using a side door close to the stage.

Events unfold like a video in my head. I'm back in 1977, twelve years ago. Mama is doing her motherly duty. She gives me the number and address. She informs me it will be a good church to go to. That I should be well-behaved, visit the family, treat them as I would my own family. I must be helpful because they may need me. She reminds me they have younger children and that I should be a sister to them, just as I am with my siblings. I am nineteen years old, leaving home for the big city, Pietermaritzburg, to train as a teacher.

"Comrade Mapule!" A voice, accompanied by a hand in the air, almost shouts from the back. The speaker does not wait for a response. She walks through the chairs in no time, delegates watching. I recognise her immediately. We spoke at length when she came to the registration desk. Her complexion matches black olives. She is based in Moscow, a medical doctor. I don't remember her name. The chairperson waits, clearly giving her permission to speak. She stands in front, without getting onto the stage, speaks loudly without the microphone.

"Comrades, I am thoroughly disturbed by this news. I don't know Reverend Dladla, but as someone coming from Natal, the absence of anyone in this room who knows him is a clear demonstration of our movement's weaknesses."

By now the silence pounds, I'm aware of its rhythm.

Images continue to unfold.

I called him Malume, just as Mama suggested. He started by making time when we could be alone. He would drive me to the hostel after I'd had supper at their home. He would insist I didn't take the taxi. Auntie would agree. On some days I cooked supper, as Auntie did not enjoy spending prolonged periods in the kitchen. I was doing as Mama had instructed. I liked the children. I helped them with their homework. They liked me. They called me Sisi.

"The movement is failing the Zulus among us, comrades. People are dying in Natal. Our people. What has the movement done, so far, huh? Can anyone here and now say what the movement has done about the special case in Natal?"

Malume always had a chocolate bar. He would let me step out of his car, then take a bar from his cubby-hole and say something like, "Thank you. Your aunt's health is going down and down. She really appreciates your coming over to cook for us." I would take the bar, thank him and disappear into the hostel. I didn't understand Auntie's health problem. She seemed fine to me. Secretly I thought she was just lazy, the complaining type, a hypochondriac, really.

I still wish to correct the small detail. His name is Reverend Mdladlane. Such a detail is important. I cannot find my voice. It's too late, anyway. The mood in the plenary room has changed. I should have spoken at that moment when I was invited to speak. I decide to let it go.

"This is a special case that deserves the movement's attention. I cannot sit here and watch us observe a moment of silence, and then continue as if nothing happened." Comrade Moscow finishes talking and walks slowly back to her seat.

The room begins to vibrate now, voices coming from all corners.

"I support the comrade that just spoke."

Heads turn to where the half-shouting voice comes from. Someone from the centre of the room is speaking right where she is seated. Then everyone begins to talk at the same time.

Someone from the back, close to my team's table, starts shouting. Her voice carries over every other voice. I don't recognise her face at all.

"Comrades, I'm based in Angola. As comrades from Natal we've been raising this issue with our commanders and commissars in the camps. We are soldiers, comrades. We want to be deployed back home to face the enemy. Our own people have now become our enemy. The state has turned them against us. We are soldiers. We *can* face Inkatha. What do our commanders and commissars say? 'Not yet, comrades. Comrades, that's not a good tactic. Comrades, our tactics need to match our strategy. Comrades, this is a very delicate matter. Comrades, we have to wait for...?'"

"Order! Order, comrades!" Mapule speaks through the mike with a vehemence I never suspected she possessed. It dawns on me that this is why she has the job of chair.

The speed with which the actions unfold make my head feel bigger.

One day, about six months down the line, as he drops me off, he thanks me for having been helpful while Auntie has been so sick. He says he wants to thank me properly by doing something special.

Auntie has been in hospital for a week. For the first time I believe she is really ill. I have done the best I can to make her and the children comfortable. My schoolwork has suffered, though. I have been spending far too much time away from the hostel.

I tell him it was nothing. Auntie is like Mama to me. I did exactly what I would have done with Ma.

It takes time before the Kaunda room responds to the plea for order.

Mapule waits for silence to settle before she speaks.

"I know this is hard for us all, comrades. I may not be from Natal but I know the pain the comrades must be feeling..."

"It's time for action. Now!", a voice bellows from the left side of the room. It's a male comrade.

Mapule interjects, "Comrade, order! You have observer status during this conference."

"As I was saying, comrades," Mapule starts again, "The issue of escalating violence in Natal is undeniably critical. However, this conference is focused on something else. Something I know is close to all our hearts, a non-sexist constitution, a route to women's liberation."

I'm already out of the car when he tells me about his idea. He asks if I've ever been to the Lion Park. I shake my head. He wants to take me there, on a Saturday when I don't have to worry about school. How generous, I think. Two of my friends have just been there, thanks to their boyfriends. They went there as a group, a foursome, for a picnic. They could not stop talking about the fun they had.

The doctor from Moscow stands to speak without permission from Mapule. "Therein lies the problem, comrades. Are women not dying in the state-sponsored, Inkatha-executed slaughter in Natal as we speak? Are women not victims of the state's violent machinery? Are women not dying, comrades? If we are here to dis-

cuss women's liberation, I say the current crisis in Natal deserves urgent attention from us. Us, women at this very conference."

I like the way she speaks. I agree with her. It seems that most of the delegates feel as I do. Many are nodding and making agreeing sounds.

"Amaaa-ndla!", a voice shouts from the front row.

"Awethu!", the Kaunda room reverberates.

Comrade Mapule takes the mike in her hand and speaks again.

"Comrades, this is a plea. Such events are meant to destabilise us. The enemy knows that such news will distract our focus. It's an old trick. Do something to derail the energies of the forces that are against you, and you win. We cannot allow that to happen."

Silence descends again.

On the Saturday we agreed on, Malume arrives alone at the hostel to pick me up. I ask about the kids. He says it will just be the two of us. My treat. It's his expression of gratitude.

There's something in the way he says that that makes me feel ill at ease.

My friends are waving me goodbye from the stairs in front of the parking lot. They wish me a groovy time, and I relax.

Lion Park, here I come.

We take off.

Mapule continues, "I have two suggestions. First and very important, let's remind ourselves that in this movement, we are one. There are no Zulus, Xhosas, Sothos, nothing. Dividing us along tribal lines was also a strategy for the Boers. Let's remember that as we move forward, comrades. This is not a theoretical suggestion. Thinking differently is an active process. My second suggestion is predicated on this mind shift. Secondly, I'd propose that we put the Natal issue..."

"It's a crisis, comrades. A crisis."

I know her. She works in the Youth League offices. Very tall for a woman, with long braids that give her face a look of someone older. Names are hard to remember today, with so many faces to work with. Her loud voice quivers.

"Unless we start thinking about it that way, we will not give it the attention it deserves. We need a strategy that responds adequately to this crisis. Comrade Reverend's death is meant to remind us of that. It is not a coincidence."

"Order, comrade."

Mapule starts again.

"I suggest we add the Natal crisis to our agenda. This will mean extending the time. We already have a full agenda. We cannot cut it. So, comrades, we'll need to sacrifice. Stay on till late tonight. Let's plan to break for supper as stated on the agenda, take just one hour, and get back at 8:00 p.m. sharp to focus on the Natal crisis."

"Elethu! I second Comrade Chair. Amaaa-ndla!", Doctor Moscow shouts.

The way she carries herself in her black conference T-shirt and black pants makes her pronouncements more believable. Maybe it's her sturdy body. Maybe it's the doctor in her. She has a presence, one that says "take me seriously".

“Awethu!”

I start to feel pins and needles in my legs. I rise from the squatting position I’ve been in, walk down the stage back to our admin table. Now I feel alone as I walk down the middle of the room, surrounded by all the delegates. By the time I reach the table and sit, the room is silent again.

The scenery stretches ahead as we drive. The road between Pietermaritzburg and Durban has hillocks that rise and fall for kilometers and kilometers on end. I am half-excited. Malume speaks a lot. He does not give me time to say much. He is talking about the family, then skips to his church work, then back to the family and the community he works with. Now and again he turns to look at me as if to see if I understand him. My eyes are fixed on the hillocks.

“I also second Comrade Mapule.”

It’s Nomazwi, our team leader. She stood up without me noticing. She is now standing right at the centre, in the aisle next to our table. Heads turn to face her. She would pass as a hospital matron, a kind and sensible one. Yesterday she told me she is a social scientist, teaches at a university in Namibia. Her Afrikaans sounds like that of the Boers back home. During our AST meetings, she slips in and out of it.

“Mapule is making a good point, comrades. I suggest we do as she suggests. That way we stay focused.”

She steps back to her seat.

Someone shouts, “Amaaa-ndla!”

“Awethu!”

“Thank you comrades, we will now proceed. Comrade Lungi, back to you.”

I notice the sign to the Lion Park and begin to look forward to the picnic. He turns into the park, pays at the gate and begins the slow drive into the enclosed wilderness.

When Lungi speaks again, I look up and pay attention. I realise that her voice has a husky ring to it that makes you want to listen. Even from the back of the room she looks distinct, the black and white kente cloth adding a layer of elegance to her frame.

“Thank you, Comrade Mapule. In the interest of time, comrades, I propose that I skip the first ... hmm ... let me see. In the first section I was going to give you a broad, very broad brushstrokes really, on the history of town planning worldwide, but zooming in on philosophies and theories of planning. Ok, I’ll skip that section. My paper is in your files...”

The Kaunda room begins to move. Delegates feel around for their files.

I am surprised the transformation is so rapid this close to the highway. The gravel road forces the car to slow down, even slower than the recommended speed. It’s very dry. Trees look unhealthy, starved and sparse. There isn’t much grass. I ask about the lions.

He turns, puts his left hand on my thigh, stares into my face, slowing the car down further. His left hand moves to the inner side of my thigh.

I freeze.

“Read that when you have time. I’ll also skip the second section, but suggest that you read that thoroughly because I delve into crucial issues: heritage, values,

African values and design as they relate to town planning. That section gives you the context that will be useful when we look at liberation of blacks and women.”

He tells me that the lions are in their own enclosure, at the other end. That's where we will enjoy our picnic. The picnic spot is right in front of the lions.

The car stops. I look around, suspecting there's some wildlife to admire.

Then everything happens so confusingly, so unexpectedly swiftly, so violently.

Reverend Malume is all over me, his hands, his face. He is kissing me, breathing heavily, his hand is between my thighs, groping.

“The third section is on governance. I'll also skip that. It's an easy read. Hmm ... I'll start my detailed presentation with the fourth section, on spatial concepts. As I mentioned earlier when I outlined my presentation, I believe strongly that women's freedom cannot be separated from apparently benign issues like physical space.”

It feels as if the whole car is rocking as he manages to hurl me onto the back seat of the car. I don't know how and when he lowered the back of the seat. I see him, his changed face, as he keeps looking fiercer and fiercer.

His body is heavy on mine. He keeps lifting it off as he instructs me to undress while he unzips his trousers.

I cannot bear everything he says between his groans. All I can focus on is how to get from under his body and out of the car.

My left hand has found the door handle. I pray the car is not locked.

“So, comrades, I want to start this section by doing a short exercise. I hope the exercise will also get those of us whose eyes are closing to wake up.”

Some delegates laugh. Lungi smiles.

“I need you to sit in groups of five. Let's move quickly into groups, then I will tell you what to do next.”

I see his penis, black and rod-like, spearing through.

I panic.

He moves off me. I see he needs room to undress properly.

I use this moment to pull the handle down. The door flies open.

With all my might, I push him away, wriggle, roll and throw myself onto the gravel. I cannot believe I am out of the car.

I get up and run. I run into the wilderness.

I stay on the road. I pray for another car to appear.

When I turn back, there is a car. His.

“Are you in dreamland, comrade Zodwa?”, Nomazwi pokes my arm with her forefinger and a smile. “We don't have to move, there's five of us.” My team is looking at me. The whole room is abuzz as delegates rearrange themselves into groups.

I can't do this. I just know I cannot do this.

“Comrades please, you have to excuse me. I have to, I have to run, I mean, I have to go to the toilet.”

I don't wait to hear what they have to say. I stand up, push the door open and run out and away, to my room.

I run faster and faster as his car gets closer. The plan in my head is clear. I will run until there's another car in sight. The wild animals can do as they please. I want to see him and his Christian conscience watch me getting eaten up.

I run.

I run.

I run around buildings, not through their corridors. When I arrive at my block, I take the stairs instead of the lift. I take some of them two at a time. I hold firmly onto the rail with each step. I stop only to catch my breath. I reach the fifth floor and turn left. My room is the second room after the stairs. I am grateful I volunteered to have it double up as an office. It seemed logical, for a runner. I share it with boxes, files, books, T-shirts, stationery. Everything the AST needed stored for the conference.

I look back. I notice another car approaching. My plan will work. The road is too narrow for cars to overtake. When the other car is right behind him, I stop running. He pulls up next to me.

"Get in the car. Have you lost your mind, Thixo mntwanandini!"

Panting, I open the back door and get in. He drives on without another word. I look back.

The car behind us follows. There are three passengers.

He picks up speed, far more than the allowed maximum.

I sit on my bed.

I stare at the conference paraphernalia. Then, I begin to sob.

By the time we drive past the lions' enclosure, swirls of dust follow us. I can't see anything behind us. He drives through the main gate. We reach the highway. We face Pietermaritzburg again. I sigh.

I have an irrepressible urge to tidy up, rearrange things into piles and rows.

I begin with the T-shirts. I re-fold. I re-pack.

I cannot stop crying, but things have to be in order before I decide what to do next.

Jill Hermann-Wilmarth and Teri Holbrook
Becoming-Exiles in Shifting Borderlands

We are 'written' all over, or should
I say, carved and tattooed with the
sharp needles of experience.

(Gloria Anzaldúa,
Making Face, Making Soul)

Please
I'm anxious to talk
I hope everything is ok
I tried to call you back
Missed you again
Missed you again
I tried to call you back
I hope everything is ok
I'm anxious to talk

Please
(Jill Hermann-Wilmarth and
Teri Holbrook, "Found Poem")*

*This and other 'found poems'
included in this article are
excerpts from the e-mails
exchanged between Author
A, Jill and Author B, Teri,
between October 18, 2010 and
November 19, 2011.

We knew each other through stories long before our series of desperate emails. As graduate students together in the field of literacy education, we had created an informal intimacy around our musings on how mothering from marginalized positions informed our newly emerging academic identities. Later, as we troubled through the first years on the tenure line, we continued to talk – albeit less frequently – about mothering as a queer parent and in a family with disabilities and the effects of those complex experiences on our perspectives and practices. And then, a seismic moment for Jill – a stage-3 colon-cancer diagnosis the week of her daughter's birth – reminded her of Teri's stories of how her stable identity as an 'author' broke when she had to confront her own complicity in the cultural construction of writing disabilities.

Please

I'm anxious to talk

² See Jill Hermann-Wilmarth
and Teri Holbrook,
"Precarious Identities:
Violent Disruptions and the
(Re)constructions of Self",
*Frontiers: A Journal of Women's
Studies* (in press).

When we discuss these seismic moments – moments when the people whom we thought we were crumbled into others whom we thought we were not – our language conjures up violence.² We talk about being fractured, shattered, splintered, fragmented. We talk about fissures and gaps, about trying to hold together pieces, to reclaim a wholeness. We talk about being shoved from the center to the margins, about finding ourselves on new lands looking out over unfamiliar vistas. In short, we

talk about becoming exiles, dispersed in a diaspora of self, in which we struggle to find our bearings. But even as we finger the torn places, we recognize the privilege in assuming soundness. White, middle-class, educated, English-speaking, without disability labels, we gasped when the ground opened up beneath us. How could Jill's body betray her? How could literacy be an instrument used against Teri's family?

Gloria Anzaldúa wrote about speaking "from the cracked spaces" as she urged feminists of color to "[send their] voices, visuals, and visions outward into the world" so they may "make a home out of the cracks".³ Anzaldúa's metaphor resonated with us, and we take up the notion of dwelling in the cracks to consider the call and possibilities residing within seismic moments when identities break. How do such instances, when the soil beneath us vibrates and separates, provoke us to create? How are they opportunities to articulate need, to re-imagine connections, to become community? Once we find ourselves surprised and walking among shards, how can we find the space and energy to re-form, knowing that the ground, once disrupted, is never stable?

*I hope everything is ok
I tried to call you back*

As we considered these questions, we also considered how speaking "from the cracked spaces" might look.⁴ If we were to make the cracks our home, what form might our voices take? If we were to send our visions outward, what would make the best wings? As we wrestled with these questions, we pulled from three disparate and provocative thinkers to draft an articulation of ourselves as exiles. In the manner of careful tea makers who combine spices and leaves in hopes of a satisfying cup, we brewed the writings of Anzaldúa with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari to render what we acknowledge is an impermanent and contingent articulation of what happens when identities break apart. From Anzaldúa, we rely on the construct of the borderlands and the plaintive power that can come with speaking from the cracks. From Deleuze and Guattari, we borrow the notions of becoming, nomads, territory, and what may be possible when we take up openings as active, ongoing, and communal sites. Together, these theorists helped us to conceptualize the cracked spaces as energetic and productive geographies where we might light, at least for a time, to consider and theorize the terrain before moving on.

Becoming-Borderlands

In the preface to the first edition of *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa writes that "the borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, ... where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy".⁵ As a cancer patient and member of a family with learning disabilities, we live in physical borderlands comprised of medicalized spaces and disciplined by diagnostic, prescriptive texts. Likewise, as tellers of theorized stories and creators

³ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Cara: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1990), xxii-xxv.

⁴ Ibid., xxii.

⁵ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, second edition (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987/1999), unpaginated.

of theorized images, we reside in academic borderlands, our work edging against and folding within hegemonic dichotomies of art/science, theory/practice, professional/personal lives. At work in the margins, we sometimes look up, disconcerted by how vast the terrain appears and how resounding the lonesomeness. But we have found in the borderlands communities of people – multiple ‘others’ – struggling to envision how to travel new paths of their own.

Anzaldúa writes, “borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition.”⁶ We trouble the borders, live in them, move across them, undo them. As identity nomads – people who take up crumbled and shifting notions of identity as conditions to “[allow] thought to wander, to move beyond any recognized ground or home, to create new territories”⁷ – we are part of communities where continually (re)formed identities become safe and dangerous, understood and confused, customary and destabilized. Narrative and image drive our work, inspired by Anzaldúa’s taut and jarring scholarship. She writes, “the Border Patrol hides behind the local McDonalds on the outskirts of Brownsville, Texas or some other border town. They set traps around the river beds beneath the bridge.”⁸ Our work has shown us how the border keepers are both external and internal, and that exposure can trigger traps. But we also know that exposure invites community, and that developing communities, particularly borderland communities, creates spaces where people *without* – without connection, without steady land upon which to stand, without a way in and a way out of the borderlands – may become people *with*.

*Missed you again
Missed you again*

Anzaldúa’s call for voices from the cracked places compelled us to consider the form our articulations might take. Working in the margins, we pushed back against qualitative research-as-usual and its traditional practices of data coding and the writing of research reports. After all, we suspected such scientific practices contoured the borderlands in which we dwelled, that they were quite literally the trowel and mortar by which margins are shaped. If we were to make the borderlands our own, claim them as territories through which we could productively wander, then we would need to choose tools and expressions that would mark the soil differently. We turned to Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of *becoming* to help us think through questions of analysis and writing.⁹ Colebrook expands upon the concept of becoming in her definition of the term:

The problem with western thought is that it begins in *being*, which it then imagines as going through becoming or movement. Furthermore, it has tended to privilege man as the grounding being; it is man who is the stable knower or subject who views a world of change and becoming. Deleuze, however, insists that all life is a plane of becoming... In order to really think and encounter life we need to no longer see life in fixed and immobile terms.¹⁰

⁶ Ibid., 25.

⁷ Claire Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze* (Crows Nest, AU: Allen & Unwin, 2002), xxvii.

⁸ Ibid., 33.

⁹ See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: The University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

¹⁰ Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze*, xx.

And later in the same text:

Becoming, for Deleuze, is not a relation between two terms. Becoming-animal is not a human being impersonating an animal; becoming-woman is not a transformation to a pre-given image of what woman is or should be. Becoming is a direct connection, where the self that contemplates *is* nothing other than the singularities it perceives. (To become-animal is thus to perceive the animal as if one were perceiving ‘its’ world. To become-woman is to create what is other than man and fixity, or to become such.)¹¹

¹¹ Ibid., 155.

So as we look to each other’s experiences as identity nomads in the margins, we are becoming-borderlands, perceiving the dividing lines, conceptualizing the keepers, living the exposures.¹² But we do so with different tools, insisting that the borderlands themselves yield to a fluidity that makes our own thinking possible. Among the tools we use in our work are images, collage, multimedia composition, and other genres and formats that allow us to scuff at the boundaries of qualitative research while articulating our thoughts concerning the disintegration of identit(ies). In that vein, the very format we’ve chosen for this work is one of becoming. Deleuze and Guattari say of the arts that “singing or composing, painting, writing have no other aim: to unleash these becomings.”¹³ We embrace this aim of the arts as we look to our own narratives, find lyricism in our casual writings, and create collage to help us move away from a static construct of identity/borderland communities/loneliness, and into a community where we can explore our seismic moments in ways that don’t rely on explanations given to us implicitly and explicitly by medical or educational or media outlets. We enter these conversations with each other, using multiple genres in the way that Deleuze and Guattari suggest – in the middle. “A line of becoming has neither beginning nor end, departure nor arrival, origin nor destination A line of becoming has only a middle It is the in-between, the border or line of flight or descent running perpendicular to both.”¹⁴ Our genres are our becoming. They are our borderline, our Anzaldúa Borderland.

¹² See Rosi Braidotti, “Embodiment, Sexual Difference, and the Nomadic Subject”, *Hypatia*, 8.1 (Winter 1993), 1-13.

¹³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 272.

¹⁴ Ibid., 293.

In the introduction to *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras*, Anzaldúa invokes a *caveat perusor*: “Let the reader beware s/he must do the work of piecing this text together”.¹⁵ Doing the work – being “forced to connect the dots, to connect the fragments” — calls readers to engage their “total person” rather than to remain at a distance: “Distancing cannot be a major strategy – only a temporary breather.”¹⁶ In this article, we juxtapose image and text, image and image, genre and genre, format and format, piecing together a textual tableau that we invite the reader to peruse. We do the map-making but not the navigation. In the borderlands, we move singularly together.

¹⁵ Anzaldúa, *Making Face, Making Soul*, xvii.

¹⁶ Ibid., xviii.

*I’m anxious to talk
Please*

We came to this work after sharing, over email and phone calls, how we’d dealt with our individual/intellectual crises in the moments that we were experiencing

them. For Jill, journaling, taking photos of her body, pouring over reports and explanations of the drugs that were healing/poisoning her became coping mechanisms. Teri made personal sense of what it meant to perform as a family with learning disabilities by reading, writing, walking, remixing – she read medical, educational, and philosophical texts; wrote formal and informal essays and papers; explored and photographed physical spaces that helped her theorize the sociocultural construction of disability; and composed instances of her thinking through collage. As we discussed our experiences with each other, we talked about how the given label often left us feeling outside ourselves, as if all the moves we’d made to be strong and in-control women had been erased by diagnosticians who knew bodies and minds but did not know us. We realized that the moments that did, indeed, erase the women we thought we were, nevertheless recreated the women we were (always) becoming. Our reflections as a community of women thrust into exile by out-of-our-control events became a part of the never-ending process of becoming.

We shared images, writing, thinking as mothers and friends, and, as we began to conceptualize our communications as data, as academics. Anzaldúa writes:

there are many modes of consciousness: the rational, reasoning mode, which is to me connected with the external reality, with the world that we inhabit right now; and other modes of consciousness connected with the world of imagination, the world of fantasy, and the world of images. Writers, artists, and creative scientists traffic back and forth between these worlds, switching from one mode of consciousness to another.¹⁷

¹⁷ Gloria Anzaldúa, “Creativity and the Switching Modes of Consciousness”, in AnaLouise Keating, ed., *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), 103.

¹⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 204.

¹⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 3.

Our data and the reporting of it represent how we move/moved between consciousnesses – our own and each other’s – in order to frame and articulate our borderlands. Art, writes Deleuze and Guattari, is “a composition of chaos that yields the vision or sensation”.¹⁸ Our work, then, seeks to compose a vision of identities always on the move.

Methodology

In this work, we explore the middle points of our new spaces, and how the exploration of these spaces was a recognition of the communities to which we now belong, ever growing, ever changing, ever becoming. We see ourselves as developing community on and in the echoes of each other’s experiences. When Deleuze and Guattari write, “Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd”, we understand their assertion intimately.¹⁹ The selves we were when we wrote in our journals or took photos of our bodies or wondered about the diagnoses that were handed to us in cool offices are different than the selves we are now, just as the selves we are now are not the selves of our futures. We are always multiple selves, both haunted and projected. The community we’ve built is with multiple Jills and multiple Teris, who needed each other in order to learn that the margins weren’t lonely. Instead, the margins can be an opened space where community is fostered to inform, bolster, and create intellectual growth central to moving forward. Deleuze

and Guattari argue that “writing has nothing to do with signifying. It has to do with surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come.”²⁰ Our writing, reading, imaging, creating do not signify our community building; they map it.

²⁰ Ibid., 4-5.

We worked with a large corpus of data. Our emails to and from each other; images (photographs and sketches) that we made of ourselves and our environments; documents and notes saved from meetings where others talked about our medicalized lives; journal entries written as long as a decade and as recently as a year ago; and a master’s thesis served as data for this work. Rather than offering a smooth portrait or a tidy text, we view our data as openings to becoming other than what we temporarily are. More specifically, for example, we look at narrative data from Jill’s chemotherapy journal; these entries were written at different points during her six months of twice monthly treatments that lasted for approximately 48 hours each, and began seven weeks after her diagnosis and surgery to remove the cancerous tumor. During this time, Jill felt desperately lonely, even in the overwhelming support of her physical community, and had an urgent, visceral need to reach out to Teri who had never had cancer. Teri had talked about the breach that occurred when, as a writer, she had to acknowledge her complicity in her own child’s marginalization as a person with learning disabilities. Teri’s sudden self-estrangement somehow helped Jill know that there would be more than empathy, more than “I’m so sorry. This must be so hard”, more than a listening ear. Complex affinity was possible.

We find that layering our work on each other’s, and, in turn, layering the work of theorists onto our data helps us to see the moments where community is possible and even necessary among those who have experienced personal exiles. The found poem that opened this work is an example of data layering, in which we juxtaposed fragments of emails. Other examples of data layering that we used are included later in this article: a ‘found’ composition – so-called in the same way that the subgenre ‘found poetry’ is called ‘found’, not because it was uncovered whole cloth but because it was constructed from existing pieces of data – and collage. These examples fold and layer images and words from our data sources with the words of the theorists whom we are using to generate our thinking. We see each of these examples as temporary instantiations, pauses in our thinking in which we combine bits of data to articulate a moment of analysis. We posit that this approach to data and analysis shows how the melding of communication and expression helps us both cross borders and create them as a community together.

In a more traditional (to our field of education, at least) academic article, the next sections of this paper would include Data, Analysis, and Discussion/Implications, reported in a linear fashion. Here, we have all of those components, but they are woven together with the thread of multiple genres. Each of the three sections – Narrative, Found Composition, and Collage – could be read without the other and still convey how creativity moves us out of a diaspora and into an exposed becoming. When read together, these three expressions of data show different snapshots of our moments of becoming. As the words of theory and experience, scientific data and personal reflection mingle with snapshots and collaged art, this multi-genred

text becomes data and analysis, and informs discussions and implications. We invite you to read/look/delve linearly or not, but with a mind open to becoming.

I'm anxious to talk

Please

Narrative: Jill

A few weeks after my surgery, I took my dogs for a long walk in the hot June sun. We were slower than my regular pace, but faster than I'd been walking in April and May due to my advanced but undiagnosed anemia that was caused by the cancer lodged and growing in my cecum, through the walls of my colon, and into the surrounding lymph nodes. I was proud of myself, even with my still swollen surgery scar and still visible stitches, for walking BOTH dogs at the same time, rather than just one as I had been, and for even being out on the road less than a month post operation. I got to thinking about how, aside from the pesky cancer, I was a really healthy person. I was a decade-long vegetarian. I was a regular runner of half marathons. My brain began to travel down a road where I questioned everything about my cancer diagnosis. How could I – I – have colon cancer? I belong to the 5 a.m. crowd at the gym! I was 34 years old! And, nobody – nobody – in my family had ever – ever been diagnosed with any kind cancer. This diagnosis could not be true.

Anzaldúa states: “And there in front of us is the crossroads and choice: to feel a victim where someone else is in control and therefore responsible and to blame ..., or to feel strong, and, for the most part, in control.”²¹ In this out of control, this without my choice, this space of feeling victimized, I needed a way to undo the oppression that someone and no one had put on me. I was in the crossroads of my pre-cancer and cancer and post-cancer selves, not knowing which one I was, which one to pick. Not understanding how to live in the new self. So, I denied the self that I was becoming and that was to come. I didn't want it, didn't know how to live in it, felt alone and exiled from my body. How did that cancer get there? Who let it in? Because, it wasn't me. I had done everything right. The cancer was, of course, removed – sent into its own exile, along with the other surgically removed parts. But that which was exiled made *me* exiled.

The other colon cancer patients receiving treatment with me were decades older than I, none were queer like me, none had active first-grade children or needy newborns like me. And, nobody in my chosen, wonderfully supportive and caring and kind community, had cancer. Members of those groups welcomed me into their folds, but I had nothing to say any more, or at least at that moment. I was the silent watcher knowing too much about this life or too little: a rhizomed Jill – one that didn't know which direction my shoots were heading, and unwilling to explore those roots in old places.²² I was in denial that the cancer was/had been there. I was in denial about what it did/does to my body, to my brain. But, there is data – medical, scientific, accepted data – that shows that the cancer was, indeed, real.

²¹ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 43.

²² See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

Even today, as I look at my pathology report and I see my name on it and I know that it's about me, I still have some of the denial that I had then. I feel disconnected from it, from this body that is described. Sitting here two years later, typing this data/narrative/analysis of this artifact of me, I'm connected to this body. My surgery scar is itchy yet numb today. My feet hurt because I ran 11 miles on Sunday. My belly is churning because I ate corn, a food that, since this surgery, is hard for me to digest, but I don't care because corn is good and I want to eat it and denial denial denial of food for too long might make my physical body feel better, but it messes with my brain. So, I know that it happened. I know they took something out. But, it is hard to imagine how that something even got there, that my body – my healthy, running, active body – had fed that something, and that as that something was becoming so, too, was I, even without my knowledge, with my passive/active participation.

Tumor size:
a. gross length 4.5 cm.
b. gross width 5.1 cm.
c. gross depth 2. Bern.

I can't even imagine what that looks like. And yet, there it was growing inside me. Causing me pain daily. Extracting iron and vitamins from my blood. Making me weaker and weaker and weaker. It had to come out. It was killing me. Killing me. I was 34. I can still not imagine this.

Received is a right hemicolectomy specimen consisting of terminal ileum, cecum with attached appendix and proximal colon.

I am a specimen. Or, parts of me are. Were. Is everything that my surgeon left in me a specimen? Am I a body filled with specimens? When do I stop being Jill and start being a specimen? Or, am I always a specimen? The specimen named Jill? Named Jill's colon? Or, just Received? For Anzaldúa,

in trying to become 'objective,' Western culture made 'objects' of things and people when it distanced itself from them, thereby losing 'touch' with them. This dichotomy is the root of all violence. Not only was the brain split into two functions but so was reality. Thus people who inhabit both realities are forced to live in the interface between the two, forced to become adept at switching modes.²³

²³ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 59.

The detached staring at my body through the lens of a camera, at my reports with my eyes but not my brain or my heart, at the descriptions of parts of me that were no longer parts of me felt out of control. This was the space in which I needed community, needed someone who knew that out-of-control feeling. Understood the fleeting image of a former self. Knew what it meant to grasp at that image.

I'm anxious to talk
Please

Found Composition: Teri

An Artist's Statement

I will come clean: I was not anxious to talk. I wanted to talk to Jill about her treatment, about what she was going through, about the cancer. And I wanted to talk about broken identities, about living in the margins, being a nomad. But I didn't want to talk about the stories, to share the narratives that I had written over the years about being in a family with learning disabilities, about believing your family to be fine, healthy, happy, and having to confront individuals and institutions who insisted it was not. The stories, these tellings were personal, raw, and besides, as a family we were moving on. I didn't want to look back.

And yet, I knew I looked back daily, maybe second by second. A professional writer, I had often relayed how, when the label of learning disability had been applied to my family, my whole world shifted, cracked. Where I had once believed in the power of words to heal, I now saw their power to harm. Where I once saw the identity of writer as honorable, I now saw it as dangerous. I turned away from words, wanting to resist them, to find ways to put them in their place.²⁴

As the conversations between Jill and me developed, changed, became more than friends talking and turned to academics wrestling, this resistance to looking back at my words showed up in likely and unlikely ways. To continue this work, I needed to go through the journals and the writings and the papers and the documents, but I found that I had (intentionally) made such scavenging difficult. Personal essays were dispersed across multiple computer hard drives, which were in turn dispersed through multiple rooms; journal entries were hidden in filing cabinets with lost keys; photos and collages were packed in boxes in the basement. Little was easily accessible; nothing at the fingertips. I made excuses to Jill as she pressed forward with her own, more recently written reflections. *I'll collect them, I'll pull them together, just a little more time.* Finally, I did as I promised. I went into the hard drives and transposed obsolete digital writings into new formats, opened the boxes, found the keys. But as I looked at the old writings around me, I found that I couldn't create from those scattered fragments a whole I was willing to share. The Teri(s) in those writings were no longer accessible, even to me. I couldn't hold her, form her, present her. Instead, she moved around me as emotive fragments that defied musculature. She couldn't be edited together into an easy and palatable read. Instead, she dwelled in the cracked spaces between the journal entries, in the selvages where one photo collided with another, in the murky landscape where theory was the air.

Unwilling to craft a smooth story about disability, we opted for a jagged text about resistance. What follows is a found composition, a juxtaposition of the photos Jill took of her body during chemo, the emails we exchanged as I went through the process of excavating the past, and Anzaldúa's words. It is "an ordering of chaos",²⁵ an attempt to momentarily articulate sense in the disorder that is made visible in sudden disintegrations of identity.

²⁴ Teri Holbrook, "An Ability Traitor at Work: A Treasonous Call to Subvert Writing from Within", *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16.3, 171-183.

²⁵ Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008) 9.

Fragmented Exposures



Fig. 1: J. H. Wilmarth — T. Hobbrook, *Untitled* (Photo). Courtesy of the authors

It feels vulnerable to look at these
[photos/words].
I cannot even imagine
putting them together.



*I shouldn't have sent the email
that just laid my doubts out bare.
I was so gullible then,
naïve, stupid
And so more hardened now
[but softer, too, like an old floor
that gives under the weight]*

Fig. 2: J. H. Wilmarth — T. Hobbrook,
Untitled (Photo). Courtesy of the authors

²⁶ Anzaldúa, *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Cara*, xviii.

Anzaldúa writes of
“maps, blueprints, guidebooks that we need to exchange
*in order to feel sane, in order to make sense of our lives.”*²⁶

Medicalized bodies are maps,
test results are guidebooks,
but they belong to other people’s
sense making, not mine.



Fig. 3: J. H. Wilmarth — T. Hobbrook, *Untitled* (Photo).

Anzaldúa also writes: “The world knows us by our faces,
the most naked, most vulnerable,
²⁷ *Ibid., xv.* *exposed and significant topography of the body.”*²⁷

But our faces are not our most vulnerable typography.
I can mask my face, compose the muscles.
I cannot take back the thoughts I have committed to paper.
Shattering/shredding/rereading — old writing can be shocking.
Your photos/my words shouldn’t have thrown me for a loop.
But they have.



Again we turn to Anzaldúa,
filled with doubt...

Fig. 4: J. H. Wilmarth — T. Hobbrook, *Untitled* (Photo).

*"In attempting to work out a synthesis,
the self has added a third element
which is greater than the sum of its severed parts."*²⁸

So that is it.

As we try to [re]make ourselves whole,
we add ever more elements,
each in themselves a severed part.
That is what makes us different than
we ever could be.

*In any case, it is all hard.
So I cannot even imagine
putting them all together
[in a story or a body
that isn't fragmented and torn].*

*Please
I'm anxious to talk*

Collage

Deleuze and Guattari define the characteristics of a rhizome: "unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even non sign states."²⁹ Collage as we use it here speaks to this rhizomatic way of thinking, and of making connections across margins and borders. For us, collage has become a visual articulation of the work that Anzaldúa writes of for people straddling the borders, "forced to become adept at switching modes".³⁰ The work of creating the art is collaborative here – a layering and juxtaposition of dialogue between the two authors, the photographs of Jill, and the ways that Teri's experiences in exile provided links to Jill's crisis.

²⁸ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 101-102.

²⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 21.

³⁰ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 59.



Fig. 5: J. H. Wilmarth – T. Hobbrook, *Shoulder* (Collage). Courtesy of the authors



Fig. 6: J. H. Wilmarth – T. Hobbrook, *Scar* (Collage). Courtesy of the authors

Teri played with two images: the photo of Jill's shoulder with the chemotherapy port, and a mannekin photo that she enlarged to fill the canvas. She wanted to work with segmented body parts, to remind herself that bodies, like collage, are fragmented, and the mannekin came pre-segmented. As she glued, she kept being drawn to an old pink ribbon that tied up print ephemera – old documents, no longer useful – she had collected. The ribbon – faded, pressed in places so hard it looked broken – reminded her of the anger Jill had expressed over the dominance of breast cancer within the cancer universe and all that its dominance implied: sexism, sexualization of cancer to make it palatable, the ignoring of other cancers. Teri placed the mannequin on the far left of the canvas and covered it with black tissue paper until only portions showed: the legs (cut off at the crotch), the hip, a bit of outstretched arm. She glued the pink ribbon on top of the black paper so that it dangled over the mannekin's legs, reminiscent of a skirt. At the top of the canvas she affixed two old documents – a Hartford Trust Company check and a license to operate radio receiving equipment, circa 1931. These two documents attracted her for a couple of reasons: 1) the multiple meanings of the word *trust* (to rely upon or to have faith in; a vehicle to hold something precious for the future) and the trust in bodies and words that we felt had been decimated; 2) the connection between the equipment (port) on Jill's body and the permit's official sanctioning of equipment use. The paper in this collage is intentionally wrinkled and folded, like skin, like relationships, like theory.

When she first printed out the photo of Jill's scar, Teri was struck by how much it reminded her of a Renaissance painting, the ones where the artist had studied musculature and emphasized his observations in paint. She wanted the photo to stand out, so as with *Shoulder*, she covered most of the canvas in black tissue, urging the paper to fold and wrinkle. Here, too, a ribbon factored into the collage, a red gossamer that echoed the scar. The collage *Scar* echoes and speaks to *Shoulder*. The documents are old, with the exception of a ripped page from Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, centered on the canvas.³¹ Above the ripped page is the fine print of a contract's "terms and conditions", which are binding but also subject to human vagaries. In the bottom far left hand corner, a lading form, dated 1930, reminds trustees of what is and isn't 'non negotiable'.

Reading across the two collages, trust is an implied distrust. The scar is both a healing and a reminder of broken assumptions. The things the authors held in faith (bodies, language) became something else in the transaction. In *Shoulder*, the wound is open but covered; in *Scar*, the wound is closed but uncovered. We can decide what to reveal, and then again, we can't. Jill can show the scar but must hide the wound. Teri can hide the documents but is called again and again to inscribe words; when she does, she sees that her reluctance is the scar.

*I'm anxious to talk
Please*

³¹ See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

Becoming-Nomadic within the Cracks

³² Anzaldúa, *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Cara*, xxii.

The collecting, the writing, the reading, the viewing of this work is a part of the becoming of who we are at the moment we send final edits to the editors. Each time we return to this work, or we reorder the images and words, or we think about how another image/narrative/report/theory would have shown our becoming differently or more effectively, our becoming continues/shifts/complicates. The landscape of the ‘cracked spaces’³² from which we are working moves and resettles and moves again. This highly theorized and, to borrow a buzz word from policy makers, data-driven work shows that non-traditional forms of expression are both a) academic in nature and b) a part of the work of women in exile. Dwelling in the intermixed borderlands where we find ourselves because of these identities exposes how our seismic moments and our academic selves inform each other. This work becomes a way we articulate within that ongoing borderland.

Within cracked spaces, neat and easy binaries lose footing. Traditional notions of data, analysis, implications often suggest An Answer to A Problem; therefore, they can serve as stoppages to ongoing complications of thought. In this piece, we collapse all of those dichotomies within this borderland in which we move. In so doing, we create spaces for becoming within theory and experience, scientific data and composition. We find this collapsed space to be one of creative and intellectual productivity.

Finally, our aim was to respond to Anzaldúa’s call “to [send our] voices, visuals, and visions outward into the world” so we may “make a home out of the cracks”.³³ While we are not settled in the cracks and never can be, the voices, visuals, and visions in our work articulate a moment of becoming. This moment is an invitation, a welcoming, a showing of our spaces. Cross the borders. Come in. Shift this crack again. Please. We are anxious to talk.

Writing Asian Diasporas and Envisioning Shifting Identities in the Art of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Trinh T. Minh-ha

The woman who begins her struggle from language is carrying out a many-sided task: she is trying not only to 'express the unexpressable' (as Barthes says), she writes (in) the space where the question of saying, of being able to say and of wanting to say is asked.

(Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Framer Framed*)

She – of the interval

In this essay I analyse the visual and written artworks by two contemporary Asian writers and filmmakers who immigrated to the United States – the post-colonial female artists Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Trinh T. Minh-ha. My analysis is meant to contribute to a criticism interested in the politics of migration, exile and translation. It is a critical attempt to focus on Asian female authors, while interrogating the conditions of their interpellation of the West, where they seem to be trapped in specific orientalist discourses. In my reading, I am guided by the concept of 'writing diaspora', which I borrow from Rey Chow's collection of essays with the same title.¹ In this key text, the cultural critic from Hong Kong asks: "how can women speak? How do women intervene? How can women articulate their difference without having that difference turned into a cultural ghettoization?"² Part of the goal of writing diaspora is thus to unlearn that submission to one's ethnicity such as 'Chineseness' as the ultimate signified area.³

Following Rey Chow's invitation to look at discursive strategies of 'writing diaspora', my article shifts from the autobiographical genre of Asian American women to a 'third' space, to a different poetic form. Naturally, the expression is here used quite differently from the political notion of 'Third World', that often implies a hierarchy of countries, or, in the best cases, a form of political solidarity. The notion of 'third space' that I employ comes from a critical lineage that emerged in the early eighties in Latin America, where the idea of a *Third Cinema* began to develop. A few years later, the post-colonial art journal *Third Text* began to be published. In 1989, a special issue of the British *Framework* addressed the question of "Third Scenario: Theory and the Politics of Location", in an intense and original dialogue among Stuart Hall, Isaac Julien and others.⁴ We should also not forget the important contribution by Jim Pines and Paul Willemen in their *Questions of Third Cinema*.⁵ In addition to these theories, I will draw from the concept of 'third space' as defined by Stuart Hall and, later on, by Homi Bhabha:

[I]t is significant that the productive capacities of this Third Space have a colonial or postcolonial provenance, ... the theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation

¹ See Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 16.

² Ibid., 107.

³ Ibid., 25.

⁴ See Stuart Hall, "Theory and the Politics of Location", *Framework*, 5, 1989.

⁵ See Jim Pines and Paul Willemen, *Questions of Third Cinema* (London: BFI, 1989).

may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism and the diversity of cultures, but on the in-scription and articulation of culture's hybridity. ... It is worth noticing here that it is the 'inter' – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. It is only by exploring this Third Space that we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves.⁶

⁶ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 39.

My essay focuses on female examples of the poetic and political creative displacement of multiple forms of diasporic and non-hegemonic writing, in its refusal to carry the burden of any pre-defined and univocal identity. The experiments I hereby describe are particularly interesting because they escape both the autobiographical and the collective 'we', which often ignores difference in the narration of oppressed people. This is the context where Trinh T. Minh-ha complicates the history of western dualism between male and female forms of writing, so as to be able to conceptualize a 'third scenario' as a challenge to that logic that we often take for granted.⁷

⁷ See Trinh T. Minh-ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

Visions of a 'Third Space'

Since the seventies, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Trinh T. Minh-ha have developed unique forms of writing, which are neither literary nor purely visual. While their writings are interspersed with theory, they are not purely theoretical; similarly, when they deal with personal memories, they cannot be pragmatically reduced to biography. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Trinh T. Minh-ha situate themselves in border zones by molding different materials into heterogeneous forms of art that incorporate film, calligraphy, and photography. These two post-colonial artists reflect on contemporary events and relay the colonial wars in East Asia, especially in terms of the forced migrations across the Pacific Ocean, and the violence of American twentieth-century imperialism.

The work of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, in particular, deals with exile, the loss of family relationships, the implications of multi-lingualism, and the complex interplay between language and memory. Her diasporic sensibility appears in the constant refusal to privilege any particular form of art over another, in the incessant passage to and from her installation's screens, at the margins of her canvas, or in the spaces that mix images and words on the pages of her poetry books. As real and imaginary stories appear intermittently at the edges of history, her work values those female stories and multiple subjectivities that border on the invisible. It develops through the constant crossing of images, and the juxtaposition of languages and poetic genres. Her poetics investigates the empty spaces and the distances between these spaces where multiple voices re-member and dis-member their disrupted storytelling.

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's work cannot be addressed without considering biography. As a child, Cha – who was born in Pusan, Korea in 1951 – had to move to Hawaii where her family took refuge during the Korean War. In 1962, she settled in

California, where she enrolled in a Catholic school, and learnt French. She studied film and art at the University of California, Berkeley and went to France in order to pursue her graduate studies. Two decades after her immigration in the US, before getting married and moving to New York in 1980, she briefly went back to Korea. In 1982, at the age of 31, Cha was tragically murdered. Her premature death was particularly felt in the art world of the time, because of the importance of her innovative experiments in film-making, installations and video-art. What was also striking was that her book *DICTEE*, which was published just before her death, touched upon the themes of death, loss, and memory, and dealt with the ‘erasure’ of female narratives, thus becoming the mourning space where the biographical traces of the artist and poet Cha were last visible and audible.

Against the background of the painful correspondence between the themes of her artistic pursuit and her sudden death, her life and her entire family history were deeply marked by exile. In the thirties, because of the Japanese invasion, her parents had to move from Korea to Manchuria. At the end of World War II, they went back to Korea, only to find out that their country, under the devastation of the Korean War, was divided and ruled by a dictatorship. In 1963, they left once and for all for the US. In Cha’s work, the recurrent subject of exile is illustrated by the blank pages and by the dismembered words of a fragmented poetics that conveys the arbitrary, forced and violent, nature of diaspora.

In her poem “Exilée Temps Morts”, written in French, Cha deconstructs the spelling of the word ‘exile’, hinting at poetic practices typical of earlier Dadaist and Surrealist experiments:

EXIL
EXILE
ILE
E’
E’ E.⁸

⁸ Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, “Exilée Temps Morts”, in R. Williams, ed., *Hotel, Collection of Written Works by Visual Artists* (New York: Tanam Press, 1980), 113.

‘Exile’ begins in the obliteration of one’s origin; in the act of translation, a female human being is eroded and fragmented into pieces. The word “Exilée” is broken into three parts, revealing the hidden verb *to be* (“ilée” in French sounds like the third person present tense “il est”), and the presence of an island (in French, “île”), which, as a product of fragmentation, highlights the condition of isolation. The letters “E’ E”, finally, reproduce the French form for female nouns: here, exile is gendered as a woman, as the isolated and exiled author Theresa Hak Kyung Cha.

In 1980, Cha produced the video-installation entitled *Exilée*, combining images that were broadcasted on a film screen and, simultaneously, on a TV screen, which the artist placed in the middle of the film screen. At times, the film projects an image while the TV is off; at other times, the TV screen contains small images surrounded by the large black space of the film screen. A sense of dissonance between the two is conveyed by the different qualities of light emitted by the screens. In

particular, the video behind the feeble glass screen is contrasted with the brighter light emanating by the film screen.

As Trinh T. Minh-ha subtly noted in an essay that pays homage to Cha, the material composition of the screen plays an important role in the artist's work, becoming one of its recurring symbolic elements.⁹ Here, while the large and cyclical images are like clouds, the installation's final image shows an empty envelope covered in dust. Exile is evoked by the presence of small objects, casting long shadows on the screen. They are arbitrary things – a cup, a mat, a windowpane – that constitute one's memory and that express some of the sensations that Cha, as a child, must have experienced in her exile from Korea. The empty rooms and the light reflecting onto the empty surfaces create a striking distance from her personal memory, removing all subjective elements, and also displacing the subjects – the people, their portraits and their signatures – of autobiographical narration. The soundtrack, which consists of a recorded voice, shifts between the inside of the screen and its outside, by repeating the following sentences:

Twice, two times two
One on top below another one
There are many twos in the twohold.¹⁰

The voice, which does not express a direct comment on the images, repeats the dualistic relationship between the screens, as if to imply a multitude of doubles. As stated in a posthumous anthology, "Exilée Temps Morts" originates from Cha's first return trip to Korea in 1979, seventeen years after her departure.¹¹ The voyage back to Korea is characterised by the long duration of the flight, and by time-zone differences. The trauma of loss and displacement, and the distance between Cha and the place where she grew up is rendered by the repetition of time measurements:

Following daylight to the end
of daylight

Ten hours twenty three minutes
sixteen hours ahead of this time

Ten hours twenty three minutes
sixteen hours ahead of this time

Ten hours twenty three minutes
sixteen hours ahead of this time.¹²

Cha's poetics relies on the repetition of words, which appear and disappear in the sequences of the text, changing and breaking it. In her *DICTÉE*, in her video *Vidéoème*, or in her *Commentaire* on cinema, writing is a way of interrupting and dividing; by making silence audible, the words create white and black spaces on the surface of the page. According to Constance Lewallen, Cha's written work is always also visual; her short sentences and her dramatic punctuation give her texts

⁹ Trinh T. Minh-ha, "White Spring", in Constance Lewallen, ed., *The Dream of the Audience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 42.

¹⁰ Cha, "Exilée Temps Morts", 41.

¹¹ See Elaine Kim and Norma Alarcón, eds., *Writing Self, Writing Nation: a Collection of Essays on DICTÉE by Theresa Cha* (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1994).

¹² Theresa Hak-Kyung Cha, *Exilée* (video), transcription of the audio track (1980).

¹³ Lewallen C., ed., *The Dream of the Audience: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, 1951-1982* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 1.

an internal rhythm, which is repetitive, condensed and, at the same time, infinitely expanding. For the art critic, Cha's written work is "mail art, work on fabric and paper, photocopies, stencils".¹³ An example of this kind of dispersed writing, in which the idea of blank space and pauses are central, can be found in *Audience Distant Relative*, the poem published in 1977 as a series of seven lithographies. Cha chose to leave the space of a white page after each written page:

From the very moment any voice is conceived whether
physically realized or not
manifested or not
to the very moment (if & when) delivered

.....

echo

.....

the in-between-time: from when a sound is made
to when it returns as an echo
no one knows if it was heard,
when it was heard
when it would be heard
if ever at all
but it continues on and on and on
maybe thousand years
someone's memory

tale
legend
poem
dream.¹⁴

¹⁴ Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *DICTEE* (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1982), 12, 14, 16.

The graphic composition of the poem is marked by intervals and silences. The reader is invited to look at the distance between the words, those empty spaces or that "in-between time" appearing on the first line of the last page of the poem. It is also a reflection on the distance between the moment of the poem's conception, the moment of its enunciation, and the moment of its reception by a hypothetical audience in different space and time. In the distance between thought and its expression lie the traces of Cha's sense of memory – "someone's memory" – as a personal and collective story – "tale, legend, poem" – of a people in exile. There is an indefinite interval among the multiple words, the stories, and the distances that assemble their 'in-between' time. Each legend, poem, or dream can be echoed, found in a distant location, or become lost: "no one knows if it was heard, when it was heard, when it would be heard, if ever at all, but it continues on and on and on."¹⁵ The speech act can fail, the narration can be manifested, or not – "heard or not" – but both stay always already suspended in their uncertain intervals.

In general, the limit of the expression, be it vocal or graphic, is a central aspect of Cha's written and visual work. She stays at the point-zero of enunciation, describing

¹⁵ Ibid., 106.

the conditions of speech for those who live in translation, expressing themselves in the ‘other’ language imposed by colonialism or immigration. Cha uses fragments of different languages, leaving the ‘wound’ open, and showing the harshness of the passage among them. Lawrence Rinder argues that Cha positions her voice in a space of otherness *vis à vis* each language, using English as an acquired and manipulable medium.¹⁶ This is one of the reasons why the reader stays suspended; Trinh T. Minh-ha wonderfully describes her sensations in front of Cha’s installation, “as if transported mid-flight by a feeling of both undefined loss and utter lightness”.¹⁷

The sense of loss, disorientation and lightness characterizes the most widely known book written by Cha, *DICTEE*. At the beginning of the introductory part of the text, she takes us to the trauma of being forcefully identified, as when the immigrant is obliged by the border authorities to answer the question “Who are you?”:

From a Far
What nationality
or kindred and relation
what blood relation
what ancestry
what race generation
what house clan tribe stock strain
what breed sect gender denomination caste
what stray ejection misplaced
Tertium Quid neither one thing nor the other
Tombe de nues de naturalized
what transplant to dispel upon.¹⁸

The poem enacts the repeated interrogation, questioning both the origin and the brutal necessity to define oneself univocally and clearly – by blood, tribe, caste, or gender. Towards the end of the poem, the questions shift towards a presence that appears to be out of place (or “misplaced”), ejected (as in “stray ejection”), like a denaturalized third element (“tertium quid”) or a “transplant” irreducible to any clearly defined identity. Yet, while the far away place – afar – is literally transformed into a geographic place of origin: “a Far”, the poetic lines become gradually longer, as if to accommodate otherness.

The Loss of Names and Memories

In the work by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha the references to exile and obliviousness all involve the loss of names and languages. In a violent imposition that requires an answer, the stranger is asked to tell who s/he is. In truth, her answer can only reduce the complexity of her subjectivity to a univocal and short utterance: the name. This may have been so often translated that it transforms into something else, eliding memory, or accepting external attributes to attach to one’s self.

Migration and the loss of names are recurrent themes of Asian and other non-European diasporas. Chinese or Arabic characters, when translated into

¹⁶ Lawrence Rinder, “Korea: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha”, in *The Dramaturgy of Style: Voice in Short Fiction* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986).

¹⁷ Trinh T. Minh-ha, “White Spring”, 33.

¹⁸ Cha, *DICTEE*, 20.

western languages, must be recomposed into different sets of symbols; even more poignantly, the composition of a name in Asian characters is untranslatable into English, marking the deepest loss for the bearer of that name. Cha's work takes us to the originary moment when the loss of names takes place. The question "Who are you?" is first asked at border-crossing points, or at the end of a journey – in both cases, declaring one's origin coincides with one's name loss.

The name and the act of naming recur in many of Cha's writings. In the edited volume of poetry *Hotel*, the form and the content of her contribution are all inspired by immigration. Here, the form that the migrants have to fill in when they arrive at destination, already constitutes a sign of exile. The act of filling it in, simultaneously acknowledging what is left in the blanks, questions the entirety of one's life, scrutinized in one moment in its most familiar aspects. The name, which is so close to its bearer, is made uncertain, mispronounced, re-written, translated, and often erased. Inscribed on the form and expressed in the foreign language, the process of being renamed is the first experience of loss encountered by the immigrant. When Cha uses this everyday form of questioning as the material for her poetry, she gives us, as Trinh T. Minh-ha states, the exact feeling of "undefined loss and utter lightness":¹⁹

¹⁹ Trinh T. Minh-ha, "White Spring", 33.

NAME - NOM
SEX- SEXE
BIRTHPLACE – LIEU DE NASSANCE
BIRTHDATE – DATE DE NAISSANCE
WIFE/HUSBAND – EPOUSE/ EPOUX
X X X
MINORS – ENFANT MINEURS
X X X
ISSUE DATE – DATE DE DELIVRANCE
EXPIRES ON – EXPIRE LE

BEFORE NAME
NO NAME
NONE OTHER
NONE OTHER THAN GIVEN
LAST ABSENT FIRST
NAME
WITHOUT NAME
A NO NAME
NO NAME
BETWEEN NAME
NAMED.²⁰

²⁰ Cha, "Exilée Temps Morts", 154.

Each line of this poem reminds the reader of how it feels to fill in the form or to have to fit within strictly defined categories: *last name*, *absent*, *given name*, *first name*, *other*, *none*. Its end is written in two lines – "between name" and "named" – that call attention to what is left of the subject when inscribed in the spaces between transcription and translation. The poem's last word – the lonely past tense "named"

– hints at the process of being named according to an enforced act of definition
– that is, what closes and flattens the person into ‘one’ word.

In *DICTEE*, probably her most experimental work, Cha comes back to the theme of naming and renaming, this time in relation to the Koreans’ renaming by the Japanese occupying army, when, in the Thirties, they had to adapt their names to the Japanese alphabet. This process of ‘translation’, which proves a recurrent colonialist policy, is evoked in all its brutality, even though the poem does not use any narrative or historical documentation:

Some door some night, some window lit some train some
city some nation some peoples
Re Named
utterly by chance by luck by hazard otherwise.
any door any night any window lit any train any city
any nation any peoples some name any name to a
given name.²¹

²¹ Ibid., 155.

These lines show the violence of colonization in its impact on the everyday life of a people, portraying how life can be moved and renamed, scattered and randomly cast on diasporic journeys. It could belong to the experiences of many other colonized nations, from the African countries whose borders were drawn on maps by the European generals in absolute randomness, to the Americas, when they were first ‘discovered’ and appropriated by the Spanish and the Portuguese, often, later on, renamed by the English and by other colonial powers. Memories, names of places and peoples became suppressed and amputated. This poem uses the technics of cinematographic montage to convey the discontinuities existing in memory, together with the casual nature of the subconscious. At the end of another fragmented poem, titled “Temps Morts”, Cha connects visibility and memory, structured as a strange list:

Memory less image less
Scratches rising to bare surface
Incisions to lift incisions to heal.²²

²² Cha, “Exilée Temps Morts”, 85.

Memory is like a scratched surface, with scars and small rough pieces resisting the smooth act of forgetting and the flat and naked passing of time, that “temps mort” of immigration. The traces of the past interrupt the smooth linear trajectory: “scratches rising to bare surface”. This image is similarly evoked at the beginning of *DICTEE*. Unlike most books, here the first even page does not show any copyright information: it is a black page with graffiti in the middle, a scratched surface made of stone or plaster. Although the book does not explain what the graffiti means, or where it comes from, many would recognize it as a historical document of forced Korean labor in Japan. The small traces against the black undistinguished oblivion of memory are scratches suggesting strong emotions in historical contexts. In the cut lies the presence of a displaced people whose names do not make up history.

Those names remain as traces in time, embodied by the graffiti; their persistence shows the desperation of the Korean workers, and, at the same time, it suggests that, in the space opened between the past and the future, the healing process might be taking place.

Memories are threads that run throughout *DICTEE*. They appear in fragmented semblance; yet, the intense moments they express can be connected across subjective stories, legends, myths, hagiographies, diaries and historical references. In the book, if memory functions visually, the process of transforming visibility into a written language is shown as a painful, violent and, ultimately, impossible effort. When it takes place in-between images and words, across languages, remembering can only be characterized by uncertainties, gaps, spaces and closures.

For Cha, it is the reason why autobiography is impossible: the narrating subject is lost in a multiplicity of voices that are diluted in space and time. The final notes of *DICTEE* partially clarify that Cha is referring to the autobiography of St. Thérèse of Lisieux and to the diaries written by her mother. Her writing reminds us of an experimental film script using montage and shifting languages to make the usually hidden conventions of style visible. In each story, the voice and the languages are mixed and eroded to the point where there are only traces of memory left – traces that are marked by gender.

DICTEE follows an uneven rhythm punctuated by breaks and peaks of intensity. At times, different voices are presented in an opaque interrelation, and it is unclear whether they belong to the same story or subject. The photos and the illustrations are not commented on, nor are they strictly related to the text. Presented as a simple exercise in repetition, the poem's complex structure relays the voices and the stories of mothers, daughters, muses, wives, and exiles. The title probably refers to the idea of dictation, a purely repetitive form of writing and a classic educational tool to impose discipline on the student, leaving no space for creativity. The goal is to reproduce exact sounds and words on paper, which is precisely what the exile or the migrant cannot do, as she is experiencing life, as Cha herself does, in multilingual spaces and multiple memory sites.

To read *DICTEE* is to enter an uncomfortable place, leaving expectations of genres and structures behind. It frustrates all needs for specific forms of analysis. The text appears unfinished; at times, it proves too abstract, and at other times it is too personal, with its montage of calligraphy, handwritten letters and worn-out photos. The fascination only begins when the viewpoint of the literary critic is abandoned, ensnared by the rhythm of the shifts and the pauses among the images, the words, calligraphy and the film script. Cha seeks to question the inherent usually-taken-for-granted structures of language, and the power they assume over the speaking subject. By pointing at what is usually left out, she is looking for a poetic space disorientating the simultaneity of forms. The artist writes of her own vision: "my video, my film and performance works are ... explorations of language structures inherent in written and spoken material, photographic and filmic images – the creation of new relationships and meanings in the simultaneity of these forms."²³

²³ Cha quoted in Lewallen, *The Dream*, 9.

The second section of *DICTEE* is dedicated to Calliope, the muse of epic poetry, and it opens with a photo of a Korean woman, Cha's mother. Her diaries are re-written by Cha, who uses the first person voice. The reader can easily be lost in the passages embodied by this subjective narration: the female voices are mixed with historical facts and myths; political rebels are confused with Christian martyrs and saints. Against the backdrop of the Japanese invasion, the stories of migration that shape Cha's family are reconnected to historical narrations:

Dear Mother,

4. 19. four nineteen, April 19th, eighteen years later. Nothing has changed. I speak in another tongue now, a second tongue, a foreign tongue. All this time we have been away. But nothing has changed. A stand still.

It is not 6.25. six twenty five. June 25th 1950. Not today. Not this day. There are no bombs as you had described them. They do not fall.

[excerpt from mother's diary]

... You knew it would not be in vain. The thirty six years of exile. Thirty six years multiplied by three hundred and sixty five days. The one day your country would be your own. This day did finally come. The Japanese were defeated in the world war and were making their descent back to their country. As soon as you heard you followed South, you carried not a single piece, not a photograph, nothing to evoke your memory.

From another epic, another history. From the missing narrative. From the multitude of narratives. Missing. From the chronicles. For another telling for other recitations.

Our destination is fixed on perpetual motion of search. Fixed in its perpetual exile, Here at my return in eighteen years, the war has not ended ... We are severed in Two by an abstract enemy an invisible enemy under the title of liberators who have conveniently named the severance Civil War. Cold War. Stalemate.²⁴

²⁴ Cha, *DICTEE*, 80-81.

Writing shifts from personal narrations to letters, to the imagined dialogue with Cha's mother: 'you'. Different female voices compose a story of exile, with unfinished wars and conflicts, by pointing at two occasions of return: Cha's first return to Korea, and her mother's first return after being a refugee. Both women are guided by the colonial order, and both stories are outside official history as parts of a missing narrative. Memory and exile appear in fragments and repetitions. The story of Cha's immigration, after the Korean War and the partition, connects with the story of her mother, and both are tied to a young woman, Yu Guan Soon, the anti-Japanese resister who died in 1920 at age 17.²⁵

²⁵ Ibid., 25.

DICTEE touches upon the mother/daughter relationship in multiple ways. It is a shifting of voices that come from the female subconscious, where people, places, languages, and personal memories are in dialogue. They create *another history*, outside the archives of official history. The continuity among the women's stories and the experienced pain and suffering is provided by the continuous shifts between the first, the second and the third person, that convey the voices of the mother, the daughter, and the third woman:

²⁶ Trinh T. Minh-ha, in Lewallen, *The Dream*, 126.

Mother becomes more and more expansive for she is at once mother, her mother, her daughter, and the latter's same-others. Looking through the camera at Her, her sorrow and her endurance, is looking at a whole generation of Asian women, in their relation to silence and language. In dealing with the intimate and the autobiographical Cha does not need to claim the insider's position of truth Cha looks at her mother/herself *from the outside* – the way a camera gazes at its subject.²⁶

²⁷ Ibid., 133.

After the encounter with Cha in the seventies, Trinh T. Minh-ha confesses that her *oeuvre* as a film-maker is inspired, both verbally and visually, by Cha's gift of "opaque transparency".²⁷ She remarks that Cha's writing is never concerned with defined, clear and transparent objects, but is always insisting on the passages, the traces and the ruins of a speaking subject:

Seen and void. Void of view.
Inside outside. As if never.
Seen for the first time
It was, it was the past.
One is deceived
One was deceived of the view
Outside inside stain glass. Opaque.²⁸

²⁸ Cha, *DICTEE*, 126.

Cha's poetics is interested in the opacity of vision, placed in the proximity to the ruin, in the empty spaces, in the past, in the "uneven glass" that allows the contact between the inside and the outside, the matter emerging from the in-betweenness of two elements: silence and speech, light and darkness on the film screen, wake and dreamtime. Her work is concerned with the absence and presence of the female other. Trinh T. Minh-ha speaks of a 'dream':

It's a dream, one says waking up in silence, and now? One wonders whether one has just dreamt a silence or whether silence is the sound of the dream. The entire room brims with incandescent silence. ... Between reverie and resistance lies a familiar face: that of the Absent – the artist-poet who assumes the ancient role of both a medium and a magnetizer. To her falls the magical task of resurrecting voices and looks by letting shadows appear and speak in her folds. The maker-recipient is bound to dream in one and in multiplicity She makes her appearance here as Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, and she is many. I recognize her tone, the cuts, the wait, the twilight – halfway between night unearthing and day *re-veiling*. The two lights (not one, not two either) on which reason and analysis have nothing to say. I recognized that voice – plural and utterly singular. A blind voice walking barefoot into the hearth of (our) shadows. Through it, I hear, within a closer range of resonance, the voices of WoMen: mothers and foremothers of Korea, the historical voices of resistance.²⁹

²⁹ Trinh T. Minh-ha, "White Spring", 34.

³⁰ Cha's performance took place at Worth Ryder Gallery, University of California Berkeley, in 1975.

³¹ Cha's synesthetic performance was part of a group performance titled *Life Mixing* and organized by Reese Williams at the Berkeley University Art Museum in 1976.

Trinh T. Minh-ha is describing Cha's 1975 performance piece called *A Ble Wail*,³⁰ commenting on her uniqueness as an absent poet, moving between light and dark, capable of evoking different voices, languages and media. She emphasizes Cha's twilight sensibility with her veils and shadows, describing her voice as blind and multiple (especially in reference to Cha's 1976 performance piece titled *Voix-Aveugle*).³¹

She is conscious, however, of the limits of writing on Cha's "twilight, on which reason and analysis have nothing to say".³² The silences and the shadows belong to multiple female voices, which don't intend to choose between any clearly marked historical past and the present, between the singular and the plural, the colonizer and the colonized. Being herself so close to the invention of the 'third space', Cha can see, as Trinh T. Minh-ha remarks, "the many twos in the twofold":³³

The question constantly raised in our times concerns another kind of *twoness*. ... There are, as life dictates, many twos; each equipped with their sets of intervals, recesses and pauses. Many and one between(s). The third term, as I would call it, by which the creative potential of a new relationship is kept alive, between strategic nationalism and transnational political alliance.³⁴

An open conclusion

In the previous examples I have tried to illustrate how Theresa Hak Kyung Cha responds to the colonial desire for the Asian 'other', supported by the poetics of post-colonial visibility, as advocated by Trinh T. Minh-ha. In emphasizing vision, Trinh T. Minh-ha deals with the critical de-centering of realism, deconstructing the ethical and epistemological premises of the Western colonial canon of documenting and studying other cultures.

In the economy of my interpretation, both Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Trinh T. Minh-ha exemplify a creative tension towards a 'third' political and cultural space, offering a disorienting experience to Western educated audiences, and to their clear expectations. In their work, they consciously avoid univocality by refusing to privilege 'one' dominant element. Paying attention to the constant passages between the inside and the outside, their visual compositions oscillate in a 'border zone' where their critical and poetic eye looks, in the shadow, at the points of passage between the female subject and history, the visible and the unheard, the real and the imaginary.

Their work resonates with the postcolonial theories of hybridity, 'in-between-ness' and third space, as proposed by Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Trinh T. Minh-ha dislocate the stable forms of centers and peripheries, male and female, written and oral. They themselves live through the constant passage, translation, or migration, across identities and poetic languages. Rather than consolidating identities (female, Asian or artistic), they leave spaces open, expressing at the same time the manifold colonial experiences of translation and migration across different places and languages (Korean and Vietnamese as mother tongues, translated into French and English). These processes of multiple translations are called "border writings" by Chicana critic Gloria Anzaldúa,³⁵ in that they reconfigure the sense of a stable identity and a fixed language into the emergence of intervals, breaks and fragments.

The reflections that move Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Trinh T. Minh-ha speak of cultural, historical and biographical multiple ruptures. Their body of writings,

³² Ibid., 34.

³³ Trinh T. Minh-ha quotes Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's poem "Exilée Temps Morts", 157.

³⁴ Trinh T. Minh-ha, "White Spring", 40.

³⁵ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Press, 1987).

and their bodies in the process of writing, sustain the process of dispersing and rarefying the collective subject of the immigrant woman, who is, at the same time, present and absent in history, society and creativity. The voices that cross their work are never defined and marked by identity, then smudge all clear borders, and move in the vicinity of a female form of writing (*écriture féminine*), without ever being burdened by the 'representation' of Asia or of a 'general' Asian woman, only invented for the sake of nationalistic interests.

The work of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Trinh T. Minh-ha is neither written nor simply visual or multi-lingual. Their work is located in a third poetic space where images do not complete or transcend the act of writing, but, rather, they stay in an infinite on-going process that reveals their own limits and expresses their otherness to language. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Trinh T. Minh-ha embrace a 'third' hybrid poetics capable of disorienting all pre-existing assumptions on where and how 'the other' should speak. Their work is situated at the edges, where things don't end but, on the contrary, where 'events' begin.

Romantic Self-Exiles

In this essay, new-media artist Morehshin Allahyari and art historian Jennifer Way, respectively and collaboratively, explore how Allahyari's unpublished notes and recent installation, *Romantic Self-Exiles*, consisting of postcards, a film, a 3D animation and video projecting around and through a Plexiglas maquette of Tehran, engage with place and memory from the perspective of leaving yet remaining connected to Iran.¹ First, Allahyari contextualizes excerpts from her unpublished notes on self-exile and diaspora. Next, Way frames major themes in Allahyari's work, such as nation and homeland, in relation to place, collective memory and emotional geography. Together, Allahyari and Way review some of the ways in which Allahyari refracts self-exile and the collective memories she associates with her generation largely by referencing place. They conclude by reflecting on the activism of *Romantic Self-Exiles*.

Self-Exile and Diaspora

I asked you to show me the view of Tehran from your Balcony. You looked back into the monitor: "But remember? It's hard to breath here. Darkness hides it all." You still showed me the lights, the beautiful lights of Tebran, which I only started to dream of after I left.

And so, haven't we said enough? Our story... The story of one exiled nation; self-exiled; in diaspora; lost, nostalgic, displaced, split, broken, torn apart; in between. Places overlapped. Memories fading in and out. Bodies connecting or/and disconnecting. Emotions bitter yet romantic. Collective yet personal. Lives composed of units or dimensions... "[a] shared, ongoing history of displacement, suffering, adaptation, or resistance..."²

There are many different reasons to go into exile. Religious, political and economic are some of the most important. Exile is the way (sometimes the only way) to escape the pressure, the danger, the life one cannot tolerate anymore or a homeland where one is not accepted for having certain beliefs or ideologies.

Exiles live in diaspora. William Safran defines diaspora as "expatriate minority communities" (1) "dispersed from an original center to at least two peripheral places" (2) who share and maintain "a memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland" and (3) "are not – and perhaps cannot – be fully accepted by their host country". They (4) "see the ancestral home as a place of eventual return, when the time is right" and (5) "are committed to the maintenance or restoration of this homeland".³ Of course, Safran's definition only serves as a general account that includes many yet also excludes the situation of some in diaspora. In Naficy's view, home and return take on a different cast: "diasporic relationship to homeland signifies not a place of return but a source of shifting

¹ See Morehshin Allahyari, unpublished notes for *Romantic Self-Exiles*, as exhibited at the Oliver Francis Gallery, Dallas, Texas, in collaboration with Dallas Contemporary and the Dallas Biennale, 13 April – 5 May 2012. Allahyari subsequently exhibited *Romantic Self-Exiles* at the Chicago Cultural Center in Industry of the Ordinary, curated by Industry of the Ordinary and Greg Lunceford, 27 September – 31 October 2012. Allahyari's unpublished notes are the source for the material used in this section and all quotes in this article, if not otherwise signalled, are from these notes. Publications quoted in or referenced by Allahyari are cited in separate footnotes.

² James Clifford, "Diasporas", *Cultural Anthropology*, 9.3 (1994), 306.

³ William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return", *Diaspora*, 1 (1991), 83-84.

and ambivalent attachment.”⁴ There is also an important relationship between diaspora and borders: “as the borders create a tension of a line drawn and policed, diaspora contains the pain of exile and longing.”⁵

No matter which nation they belong to, exiles experience many common struggles, emotions and discourses. As there are many shared definitions, concepts and examples, we must seek to express the unique experience of diaspora, beyond its general sense. It is important to understand, for example, that Palestinian exile differs from Iranian exile. Moreover, self-exile from Iran following the 1979 revolution was experienced in a situation very different from that of the self-exile driving the new generation (my generation).

It is also important to realize that self-exile for a student from Iran on an F1 single-entry visa with a background of political activism adds complications as does having been suspended or expelled from studies at a university in Iran for political and union activities. Self-exile in the age of Internet, which provides a third space (a virtual space), along with social networking, introduces new questions in terms of the self-exiles’ personal and collective or universal experience. Furthermore, differences in the class divisions of Iranian society also make it necessary for us to inquire what experiences we (as this new self-exiled generation) “reject, replace or marginalize” in comparison to the self-exiled Iranian generation before us. Also, how do old and new discourses of contemporary Iranian self-exile “attain comparative scope while remaining rooted/routed in specific, discrepant histories”?⁶

For my generation, university admission (student visa) and political asylum seem to be the most frequent and recent methods of migration and self-exile (an estimated 70% of Iran’s self-exiled population is under 30 years of age). In practice, these events influence the lives of those who leave as much as those who stay. Something always breaks apart. A balance gets lost, such as the balance of a family when one is gone, or the balance of any relationship formed and grown through two physical bodies. When one body has left, a balance is lost, and so on. We may not ignore the relationship, the influence, the push and pull.

We sit in front of each other. 3 a.m. your time. 5:30 p.m. mine. The lights of the city in your background go off one by one. I tell you that after five years of living here, I still wake up in the morning thinking I was in my room in Tebran. The light is coming through the blue curtain of the windows, from our backyard, gentle, traveling through the space toward my face. Like the lights of your background traveling through the camera of your laptop to the monitor of my computer. In both cases, there is a sense of embodiment. Time, memory, space, and bodies collapsing, losing composition. I tell you that it’s been a while, a long, long time since the last time my memory confused the geographical position – the x, y and z – of my body; that I have started to forget the details of my room. That I postponed the act of thinking and recalling. You laugh and say: “Like Scarlet in ‘Gone with the Wind’. You can always say I will think about it tomorrow. That way you will never think about it.” Then you carry your laptop with you to the kitchen to make Persian tea. “I wish I could have you back only for one hour. So many things I want to share with you,” you say. I resist not telling you once again how much I miss the tea made with the water of Tebran. Those long nights of poetry reading, and drinking in the kitchen, or on the porch of your house... I have come to terms with the realization that ordinary things, inconsequential memories, are romanticized when the return is forbidden by one’s self or the government...

⁴ Hamid Naficy, *The Making of Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 17.

⁵ James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 247.

⁶ Clifford, “Diasporas”, 302.

Homeland as Place, Collective Memory and Emotional Geography

In explaining the meaning of 'Romantic' in the title of her exhibition, Allahyari counts herself as an exiled subject who belongs to a nation: "I am one of the many of Iranian self-exiled citizens." Of interest is the use she makes of location to express her nation as a place to which she belongs and from which she is exiled:

The *Romantic Self-Exiles* is a new body of work and the story of my self-exiled generation. It explores relationships between self and home and presents the life of those who live in-between. Those who choose self-exile over a homeland in which they are not tolerated or welcome. The word 'romantic' in this context is not used as a confirmation, rather, to question and address the romanticized aspect of exile by the self-exiled citizens.

However, rather than dwelling on aspects of its domestic or international politics, in her writing and art, Allahyari presents details of natural and cultural topography that identify the nation as Iran. She also emphasizes her and her generation's lived and imagined experiences there. In mingling these themes she conveys a longing to return that she and her peers may never fulfil: "For some, the new 'home' finally 'replaces' the homeland. For some, the replacement never occurs; they will always live in the state of between-ness." Implicit in statements such as this and in Allahyari's visual art is not simply vexation about returning to Iran but also conflict about where and what counts as the geographic, social and cultural dimensions of a homeland that, for Allahyari and her peers, in the present day is freighted with on-going memory work and burgeoning, alternative forms of community. Before reviewing some examples of how she engages with this situation, it is important to become aware of related themes in Allahyari's writing and art.

While she conceives of her nation as having a specific geographic territory, Allahyari also implies that its activity compelled her and her peers to leave and consequently troubled their ability and even diminished their desire to return:

I am one of the many of Iranian self-exiled citizens. I come from a generation of an unsuccessful revolution, an ugly war, childhoods filled with bombs, taped windows, and happiness that was short lived and rare. My generation (and I) grew up surrounded by doubt, humiliation, and unknown futures. Today, I have friends in almost every country in the world and I have a 'country' with no friends, no house, and no hope to go back to.

Usually in Iranian culture you don't leave your house until you get married. Now, you have to go study in another country, so you leave. Female friends do this. They convince their traditional families that they want to do this. Some never return.

⁷ Brian Graham, G. J. Ashworth and J. E. Tunbridge, *Geography of Heritage: Power, Culture and Economy* (London: Arnold Publishers, 2000), 2.

At the same time, Allahyari is alert to the significance that self-exiles place on Iranian heritage or "the contemporary use of the past":⁷ "the romanticized memories, places, objects when one is forced – by self or the other – to exile. This strangely includes things, places, and objects we had detested in the past and miss

now.” Importantly, Allahyari associates heritage with the locations she values as places. Tim Cresswell contends that places are “spaces which people have made meaningful. They are all spaces people are attached to in one way or another. This is the most straightforward and common definition of place – a meaningful location.”⁸ Allahyari references meaningful places from her past and present. By treating them as “a way of seeing, knowing and understanding the world”,⁹ she is able to shade the “in-betweenness” she associates with self-exile, with qualities ranging from loss, lack and isolation to access, simultaneity, mobility, community and mutability.

What fosters these qualities is the importance that she also places on remembrance. For Allahyari, in some respects her homeland has become so unsettled that it no longer exists other than in memory: “Today, I have friends in almost every country in the world and I have a ‘country’ with no friends, no house, and no hope to go back to.” The notion that a place exists and remains accessible only through remembrance dovetails with contemporary ideas about collective memory. During the early twentieth century, sociologist Maurice Halbwachs distinguished collective memory from history: “History is the remembered past to which we no longer have an ‘organic’ relation – the past that is no longer an important part of our lives – while collective memory is the active past that forms our identities.”¹⁰ Scattered through Allahyari’s writing and informing her art are references to memory not as something discrete and stable; rather, memory is a practice through which she constructs a sense of self and community, sometimes in exchanges that reveal pain and longing to catalyze a recursive narration of place: “It’s like the death of a loved one. You intend to forget about bad memories or those habits and behaviors you were once annoyed by. Only the good memories remain or are worthy thinking about. ... You say to convince me I would not miss what I miss now if I still lived back in Iran.”

At the heart of the practice is a mutually constitutive relationship of people and place to which Allahyari’s remembering testifies. It is fundamental to Halbwach’s theories regarding what is remembered and what is collective:

But place and group have each received the imprint of the other. Therefore every phase of the group can be translated into spatial terms, and its residence is but the juncture of all these terms. Each aspect, each detail, of this place has a meaning intelligent only to members of the group, for each portion of its space corresponds to various and different aspects of the structure and life of their society, at least of what is most stable in it.¹¹

Insofar as “heritage is inherently a spatial phenomenon. All heritage occurs somewhere.”¹² Similar to Halbwachs, Allahyari depends on place to concretize the memory work that is so critical to her generation’s past experience and present-day orientation to Iran:

Now let us close our eyes and, turning within ourselves, go back along the course of time to the furthest point at which our thought still holds clear remembrances of scenes and people. Never do we go outside space. We find ourselves not within an indeterminate space but rather in areas we know or might very easily localize, since they still belong to our present material milieu.

⁸ Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁰ Jeffrey K. Olick, “Collective Memory,” *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 7.

¹¹ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. and ed. by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 2.

¹² Graham, Ashworth and Tunbridge, *A Geography of Heritage*, 4.

Moreover, as her visual art bears out, and as Halbwachs explains, when “represent[ing] places to ourselves, even in a confused manner” becomes difficult, not simply space but specifically “the spatial image” offers a resolution:

Let us endeavor to go back further. When we reach that period when we are unable to represent places to ourselves, even in a confused manner, we have arrived at the regions of our past inaccessible to memory. That we remember only by transporting ourselves outside space is therefore incorrect. Indeed, quite the contrary, it is the spatial image alone that, by reason of its stability, gives us an illusion of not having changed through time and of retrieving the past in the present. But that’s how memory is defined. Space alone is stable enough to endure without growing old or losing any of its parts.¹³

¹³ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 15.

¹⁴ Elia Petridou, “The Taste of Home,” in Daniel Miller, ed., *Home Possessions: Material Culture Behind Closed Doors* (Berg: Oxford, 2001), 88.

¹⁵ Naficy, *The Making of Exile Cultures*, 17.

¹⁶ Clifford, “Diasporas,” 306.

¹⁷ Naficy, *The Making of Exile Cultures*, 17.

Romantic Self-Exiles does not dwell on a perceived “right to return” to a homeland.¹⁴ Rather, it foregrounds the space of places to provide, if not “an illusion of [the homeland] not having changed through time and of retrieving the past in the present”, then a means to reify “a source of shifting and ambivalent attachment”,¹⁵ or maintain mobility, moving in, in-between and through place as a strategy to maintain “[a] shared, ongoing history of displacement, suffering, adaptation, or resistance...”.¹⁶

Allahyari reiterates Halbwachs’ account of collective memory by using space to construct a place – a virtual café – having some measure of linking the past to the present: “We come together on a Google hangout. Our new favorite virtual cafe. One in Los Angeles, one in New York, one in Tehran, and one in Denton.” At the same time, the participants cogitate over whether Iran has become unstable and what its instability means for their sense of displacement and dislocation. The themes compel Allahyari to perceive her own art as an extension of her and her friends’ “shifting and ambivalent attachment” to belonging to one another to and through Tehran:¹⁷

We dance virtually, drink, celebrate without being together, and then depressingly end our conversation talking about how we all wish we could be closer, all in Tehran, like those old days. There are so many questions we don’t have an answer for. So many things we are getting tired of talking and complaining about, and suffering for. We get so sick of suffering, so sick of caring, so sick of missing. We have agreed numerous times that we should just let go of all this. But it is as if these have become extensions of our existence. Extensions of our bodies. Physical and virtual. Endlessly. The *Romantic Self-Exiles* is a new extension. A documentation to carry with. A diary to remember. A tragic history not to be forgiven.

¹⁸ See Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 13 and 36.

¹⁹ Halleh Ghorashi and Kees Boersma, “Berlin, Bam, New Media, and Transnational Networks”, *Civil Society* (April 2011), <http://www.arsehsevom.net/zine/?p=76>.

If the social habits they perform electronically ring hollow for the women as a way to retrieve what they lack, still, they are able to iterate traces of the past that maintain the collectivity.¹⁸ Google and its social networking capabilities provide Allahyari’s peers, whom Allahyari perceives as Iran’s second generation diaspora, with “alternative spaces for interaction among Iranians worldwide by stretching the limiting boundaries of the Iranian nation state”.¹⁹ Allahyari associates the interactivity specifically with space – “Internet adds another layer to this complication as a space

we share now” – that corresponds to the hybridized cultural third space that Homi K. Bhabha wrote about in *The Location of Culture*.²⁰ As Andrea Duffie notes,

Bhabha characterizes third space by its ambivalence, its ability to simultaneously contain and negotiate tensions between binary oppositions of space – near and far, home and away. In *Routes*, Clifford contends that the third space incorporates roots of origin and the root-less quality of the present, in order to create an alternative community consciousness that is not based within a population’s geographic location or its surrounding cultural environment. The ambivalence Bhabha attributes to third space allows for opposing viewpoints about space – its permanence and its volatility – to be addressed in such a way that neither viewpoint is completely negated nor completely endorsed or privileged.²¹

Additionally, Allahyari contends that Internet connections reify space because they facilitate embodiment. On this point she is supported by research on the reciprocal constitution of space and self through online interaction. For instance, Hardey argues,

... virtual interactions may be shaped by and grounded in the social, bodily and cultural experiences of users. It is that disembodied anonymity that characterizes the Internet and acts as a foundation for the building of trust and establishing real world relationships rather than the construction of fantasy selves.²²

Interestingly, in “Mapping Homelands through Virtual Spaces: Transnational Embodiment and Iranian Diaspora Bloggers”, Donya Alinejad contends that embodied selves both cause and result from exiled transnationals active on the Internet:

By stressing how sensations of feeling ‘at home’ under certain material and emotional circumstances are found, aspired to and remembered, this notion of transnational embodiment goes against ideas of the disembodied self, with which internet communications have been associated.²³

Thus, according to Alinejad with his research on bodily experience, Hardey challenges existing discussions about new media and embodiment that emphasize the loss of self if not also reality as a consequence of the ostensible integration of bodies with the machines they use.²⁴ In contrast to a loss of embodied self, Alinejad observes that Hardey “focuses on the assumption that although homelands are imagined, the way their attendant collective imaginations are shaped is significantly informed by embodied experiences such as physical return, or strong emotions invoked by sense memories”.²⁵

Ultimately, the reciprocal construction of not simply space but especially places, meaningful locations, and selves, leads us to links between Allahyari’s work and emotional geography. Geographer Steve Pile explains:

For emotional geography, the body is a site of feeling and experience. These experiences and feelings are socially embedded, but they are localizable in the body, and relationships between bodies. The body, though embedded in social relations, is ultimately personal: it is the location of the psychological subject. Emotions may take on social forms of expression, but behind these forms of expression lie genuine personal experiences – that are seeking representation.²⁶

²⁰ See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 311-312.

²¹ Andrea Duffie, *There’s No space Like Home: Do-Ho Sub’s Fallen Star Series and the Dichotomy of Home* (Ph.D. Thesis at the University of North Texas, 2010), 12.

²² Michael Hardey, “Life Beyond the Screen: Embodiment and Identity Through the Internet,” *The Sociological Review*, 50 (2002), 570.

²³ Donya Alinejad, “Mapping Homelands Through Virtual Spaces: Transnational Embodiment and Iranian Diaspora Bloggers”, *Global Networks. A Journal of Transnational Affairs*, 11.1 (January 2011), 46. See also Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1994).

²⁴ For example, Donna Haraway, “Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century”, in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149-181.

²⁵ Alinejad, “Mapping Homelands through Virtual Spaces”, 46. See also Hardey, “Life beyond the Screen”, 570.

²⁶ Steve Pile, “Emotion and Affect in Recent Human Geography”, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 35.1 (2009), 11.

Places that Allahyari associates with Iran cast it as a shared emotional geography – “emotions that people feel for one another and, more extensively, for places, for landscapes, for objects in landscapes and in specific situations. In such studies, people express emotions about something.”²⁷ What is more, Allahyari treats a conflation of herself, her peers and Iran as place, that is, as an emotional geographic “site of agency and a site of mobility”.²⁸

²⁷ Pile, “Emotion and Affect”, 15.

²⁸ Daniel Miller, “Behind Closed Doors”, in Miller, ed., *Home Possessions*, 12.

Romantic Self-Exiles

One portion of *Romantic Self-Exiles* consists of a black wall on which Allahyari pinned fifty-five postcards from Facebook friends along with strangers’ statements and comments on her Facebook page about Tehran, Iran and being in exile, and comments from people about missing Tehran, that she printed on postcards.

²⁹ Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 36.

On one hand, she localized her peers’ memories “by a kind of mapping”²⁹ that “by reason of its stability, gives ... an illusion of not having changed through time and of retrieving the past in the present. But that’s how memory is defined. Space alone is stable enough to endure without growing old or losing any of its parts.”³⁰ For example, she

³⁰ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 15.

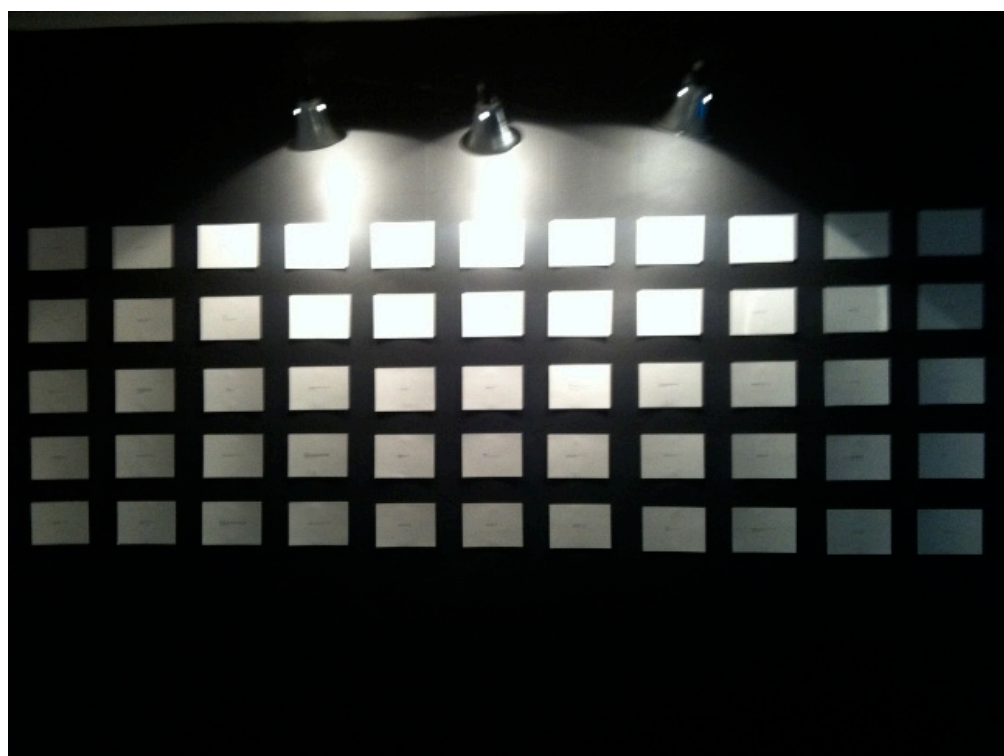


Fig. 1: Morehshin Allahyari, *Romantic Self-Exiles*, 2012, postcards. Courtesy of the artist.

arranged the postcards in rows of five high by eleven wide, thus creating a geometric grid that associates Iran and discourse about it with the steady certainty of precision and logic.

On the other hand, notwithstanding their notations of specific date, hour and minute signaling exactitude in the measurement of time, the authors of the messages, their names truncated as abbreviations, express longings that convey their homeland

through an emotional geography that would vex most cartographers charged with charting the location and boundaries of the nation. Allahyari explains, “The postcards are documentation of lives we live. Bodies coming together through machines to share the embodiment experience of diaspora. The irony of coming together for being apart.”

Correspondingly, she emancipated ‘mapping’ from popular types of information insofar as she printed the communications on postcards from which she removed any images.

At the same time, by withholding interpretation, she permits readers to reflect on whether the writers’ longing for place and desire to return is potentially impossible. Allahyari ruminated on this theme, “you start forgetting about what annoyed you. This happens in exile. You know you can’t go back. You start having memories and imagination of only beautiful things”; “When I went back to Tehran, I totally forgot about all the reasons why I left. They just hit you”; “People in Tehran remind others about the details that are problematic.”

The 16mm film, “The Recitation of a Soliloquy”, refers to a paragraph from a diary that Allahyari’s mother wrote in Farsi in 1984, during the Iran-Iraq war, when she was pregnant with Allahyari. On each frame Allahyari wrote one word in Farsi twenty-seven times and provided its English equivalent once. For example, in Farsi, “a rustling” echoes across one frame; the phrase in English appears at the bottom, where one might expect to read a translation.

In another frame, onto a map of Tehran and a half-figure image of herself facing the camera, Allahyari overlapped a map of Dallas/Denton, Texas, where she currently lives, along with an image of herself from behind. She considers this representation of herself facing outwards from Tehran and simultaneously

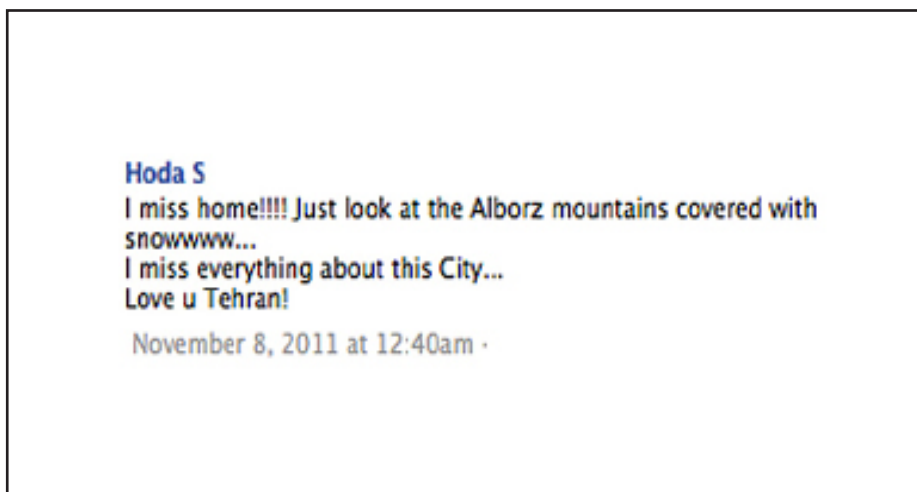


Fig. 2: Morehshin Allahyari, *Romantic Self-Exiles*, 2012, postcards. Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 3: Morehshin Allahyari, *Romantic Self-Exiles*, 2012, still from film. Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 4: Morehshin Allahyari, *Romantic Self-Exiles*, 2012, still from film. Courtesy of the artist.

looking back towards it as an efficient strategy to convey her in-between life as simply as possible.

Insofar as Allahyari's intervention into her mother's diary makes of its soliloquy a dialogue, it points to a series of relationships that the film manoeuvres into loops integrating sound, word and image, there and here, past and present, remembrance and revision, public and private, pre-existence and existence, and a shift in agency from mother to daughter. Allahyari observes:

Every time we remember a certain memory we intend to forget something about it at the very same time. Every time there is a new narration. We locate the recalled story in a very specific way. Like the telephone game. But in this case, we play it only with ourselves, in an ongoing loop.

In her film, Allahyari's relationship with her mother expresses an emotional geography linking the artist's origins and their consequences. To wit, "a rustling" signifies the first sound Allahyari's mother heard of Allahyari's heartbeat in utero. The paragraph from her mother's diary that Allahyari transcribed explains:

Sunday – 27 ordibehesht – 1984. I heard your heart. Actually on the 15th of Sharivar when I went to the doctor. It made a rustling sound and I asked the doctor what the sound is. He said your baby is laughing! and then said that this is the sound of your heart. It beats 120 times in a minute. There is a strong possibility that you will be starting to move from this month. I don't know if it's right that a person creates a child and gives birth to her without asking the child's opinion? I am always concerned that you might not feel satisfied in life and condemn me to cruelty for giving birth to you. Please don't say this... Never Ever. I will try to provide a good life for you. There is a big chance that I give birth to you in America...

Here, Allahyari represents herself as a sound her mother heard through medical technology and then noted in her diary. Much later, Allahyari translated the passage from her mother's diary into English and transposed it as film for her installation exploring autobiographical and generational Iranian self-exile. The activities Allahyari undertook to engage with her mother's past as part of her own past plus representations of herself render Allahyari a "transnational embodiment", a self-exile rooted in "personal experiences – that are seeking representation"³¹ as are their consequences. Some of these, Allahyari set forth in her notes:

³¹ Pile, "Emotion and Affect," 11.

My parents did provide a good life for me, but my mom never gave birth to me in the United States. Her broken promise has made my life completely different than what it could be (not to put value on which one is or would be better). In my 16mm film, I wrote every word of this paragraph 27 times on each frame as a way to present her diary. I then overlapped the map of Dallas/Denton (where I currently live) with the map of Tehran as a symbolic way of my recitation of her diary. To show my in-between life as simply as possible. The “Recitation of a Soliloquy” is just another way of looking at my life in exile without putting any judgmental value on my mom’s decision.³²

³² Ibid.

“The Romantic Self-Exiles I” is a 3D animation that Allahyari created “[t]o build a land; an imaginary home. To push the limits of real and unreal, memory and imagination, locality and universality, self-censorship and self-exile, time and space.”³³ The imagery, she grounded in autobiographical heritage, or “personal-emotional attachments (tables, bed, stairs)”, as well as

³³ Allahyari, “The Romantic Self-Exiles I (2012)” is available online at <https://vimeo.com/38340522>,¹² March 2013.



Fig. 5: Morehshin Allahyari, *Romantic Self-Exiles*, 2012, still from 3D animation. Courtesy of the artist.

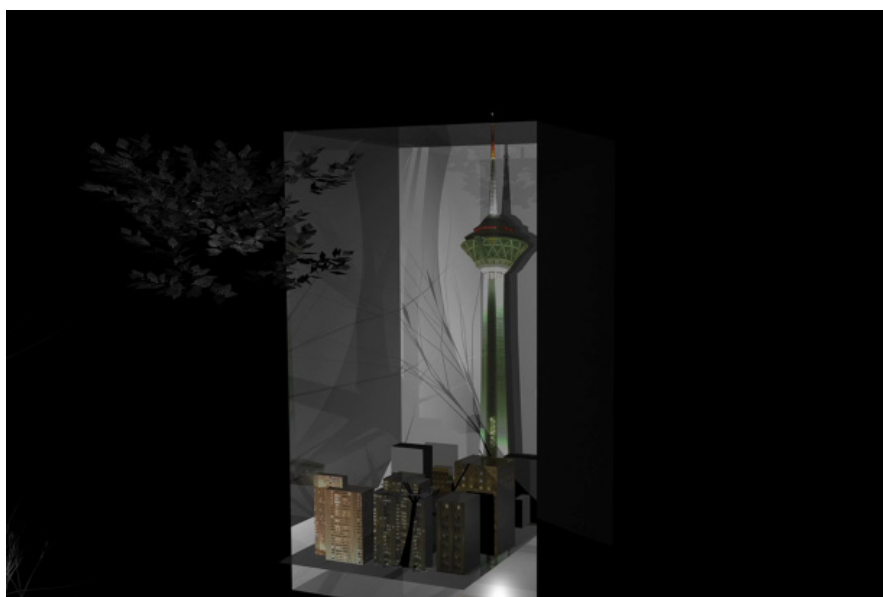


Fig. 6: Morehshin Allahyari, *Romantic Self-Exiles*, 2012, still from 3D animation. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 7: Morehshin Allahyari, *Romantic Self-Exiles*, 2012, still from 3D animation.
Courtesy of the artist.

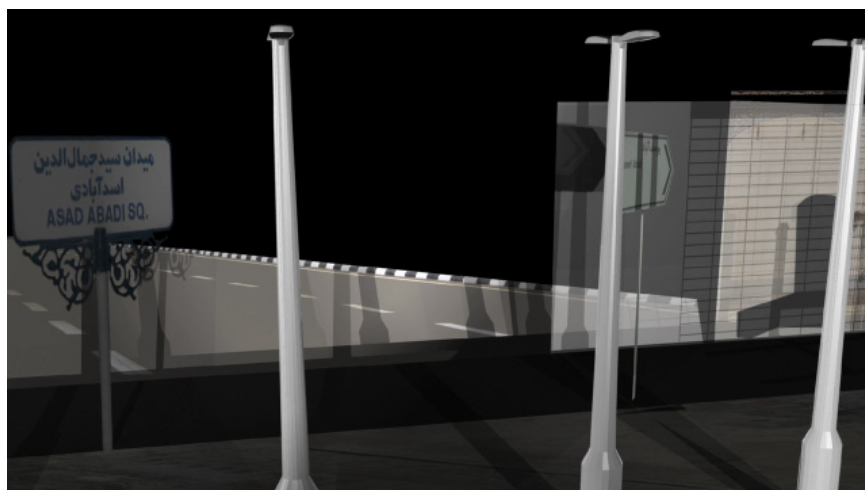


Fig. 8: Morehshin Allahyari, *Romantic Self-Exiles*, 2012, still from 3D animation.
Courtesy of the artist.



... collective-emotional attachments (Alborz mountains, street signs, the house of Tabatabaee, Vakil mosque of Isfahan). There is no place, texture, or object that is made without a personal connection to. Either way, both of the above private and public objects and places are made because I have certain memories from being at them or with them... In a poetic way, this is my romanticized homeland. What I think of when I miss it.

One scene features an interior room with large windows on either side and a table and chairs in the center.

It outlines the kitchen in Allahyari's home in Tehran, where she says "we always sat and had lunch/dinner. One of the things I miss the most about our house."

Along the back wall are broken trees “with light reflections on them that makes them glitch like that. That specific scene for me is the most central. It’s where many concepts connect. It’s my most vivid memory and imagination.”³⁴

³⁴ E-mail correspondence between Allahyari and Way, May 1, 2012.

Another scene depicts Tehran by combining real images of buildings there with imaginary textures on cubes along with a representation of the Milad, the tallest tower in Iran and symbol of Tehran.

Allahyari explains, “The trees are again between memory and imagination. For me looking like Valiasr street (the longest street if Tehran) very well known for having beautiful trees on the both sides.”³⁵ Yet another view of the city focuses on Asadabadi Square: “It’s the square of our neighborhood in Tehran. I went to school close to that square and also spent a lot of time around there when I was a teenager.” To the right, the sign points towards “Yousefabad. The street that I grew up in my whole life.”³⁶

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

In the animation, Allahyari gives the impression that the camera has the agency and mobility to engage with these places. It moves continuously at a constant pace through one scene to another, passing through walls, textures, light and shadows. As an avatar for her, it becomes a site of emotional geography while serving as a means to access places from the past, from another time and location.

Allahyari’s installation, “The Romantic Self-Exiles-II”, is an extension of her 3D animation, “The Romantic Self-Exiles I”, and a physical representation of romanticized and beautiful Tehran (unlike what in reality Tehran looks like – polluted, crowded, full of traffic and people). It iterates the city through the experience of Allahyari’s embodied self and peers, and it attests to their mobility within the city along with their ability to return after having left.

The installation consists of urbanscape made of twenty transparent Plexiglas cubes arranged on a sheet suspended from the ceiling. Allahyari considers it a maquette of Tehran. To make it appear as if it were floating in space, she overlapped it with three videos of the city streets. She made two with her iPhone during her visit in 2010; the third, showing the city lights at night, was made by Mona Allahyari and Amir Shahryar Tavallali in 2012. The videos project from one projector, covering the four walls of the room: “They pass through and reflect on the maquette, creating a sense of dream and blurry memories. With all the over-layered videos, It’s hard to tell what is exactly going on, but one can see the buildings, trees, and lights of the city expanded to four walls in the gallery... Like a city with citizens floating in between. The videos overlap on each other to bring together night and day of Tehran. Like a timeless dream.”

Conclusion

The whole work will be artistic activism.

Throughout *Romantic Self-Exiles* Allahyari’s references to her autobiography and her mother, along with her use of Internet communications, a handwritten diary,

maps, photographs of herself, visual representations of her home in Iran and places familiar to her there, Tehran's urban silhouette and videos of the city that she and her friends made, located in "social, bodily and cultural" experiences, constitute the virtual interactions that make up her current engagement with Iran.³⁷ They amount to an expression of loss. As part of her 3D animation, there is a voice over that can be heard reading the following text:

³⁷ Hardey, "Life beyond the Screen", 570.

*Our bodies have lost their dimensions... We float between the depth and the surface, reminiscence and presence, light and dark... We come from a transparent generation and a history refracted and bent. Our souls are broken and shattered by each departure stamp, dispersed and uncertain by self-exile... I have lost logic. My nights cross my days, as if the sun has overcome the sun. My watch stays on Iran's time... Its hands move without its body, like time without its country... and there is a guilt... a continuous guilt in correcting it. My voice stays in Tehran on our answering machine, and I am reminded with every call I make that my physical presence has been misplaced; that it will continue to fall behind... And I have doubted myself a thousand times with every single building I've built. Every wall, every texture, every light, every scene in this animation... They all have put one more block between home and place... Every single object exists twice... once by itself and once through its shadow... each time separated, broken into a different space. Like my voice, like the time, like our identities... Their mnemonic existence collapse every time I remember, every time I forget... with every new day in exile, every new creation in this animation, an old memory from home is superseded... like our bodies and the constant threat of their replacement... I am now a few light years closer to distance... upside down, I feel faded in my memory... How much longer shall we escape from our "cat's" shadow? I have learnt neither pride, nor directionality from drawing its shape. We can no longer be brothers and sisters by geometry. We each speak a new language... Words themselves have become allusions of our tragic yet romantic separations. We no longer mean where we are from.*³⁸

³⁸ Allahyari, "The Romantic Self-Exiles I" (2012).

In her voice-over, Allahyari mentions bodies that lost their dimension, broken souls, lost logic and the collapse of time. However, in addition to referencing loss, the emotional geography of her work also serves as a "site of agency and a site of mobility",³⁹ and it bears activism. For one thing, *Romantic Self-Exiles* fosters respite from loss if not through the reclamation of a specific place then surely through reflection, recognition and taking stock of the present. It is willing to express if not understand what we now mean if "we no longer mean where we are from". Allahyari clarifies:

³⁹ Miller, "Behind Closed Doors," 12.

The voiceover reads the text that was developed simultaneously with the animation, going back and forth between describing the emotions, thoughts, lives, and scenes, and weaving the self-awareness into the falseness of the animation. The text specifically addresses and describes the position of self-exiled citizens and at the same time takes a personal perspective to explain the animation and emotions involved.

⁴⁰ Charlotte Nekola, "Activism", in Cathy Davidson and Linda Wagner-Martin, eds., *The Oxford Companion to Women's Writing in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1995); Oxford Reference Online at <http://www.oxfordreference.com/>.

Allahyari's work merits consideration with the work of other women creators "[f]orging relationships between self, the local community, and the global".⁴⁰ Shaped by the trajectory of politics in Iran and international relations, her writing and art allude to some of the conflicts experienced by women born in Iran during the mid-1980s who strive to be intellectually and creatively active at home and who, following self-exile, pursue strategies of belonging thereafter.

She writes: “[t]he topic of self-exile is being explored while in the process of making the animation. I as an artist of exile feel more and more exiled everyday with new works, interviews, and political activities that I do that make it more risky to return to Iran.” To this context Allahyari brings an awareness of the contribution her work makes to illuminating the lived experience of self-exile. She represents herself reflexively and with a generation through and constitutive of diverse modes of space nuanced by their respective and collective memory work. At the same time, she remains alert to the ironic prospects for fostering change that various types of distance from Iran both afford and preclude:

I agree that women in most of the cultures censor themselves in many similar ways. But the issue of censorship – the Iranian version – was something that did not end or change when I first moved to the United States. I always think about it this way: as Iranian women, artists, and specifically activists, we carry those cultural taboos, those political rules, those must and must-nots with us everywhere we go. Dictators travel with us. In our pockets. In the back of our heads. We travel with those conscious and/or unconscious self-warnings. We cannot simply get rid of them, because they very much influence our lives, unless we never go back to Iran. And so for me, the issue of censorship was there until I decided not to go back to Iran for a while and stay in the U.S. and make what I should make without being worried about the ‘side effects’. So at that point, I started to feel less pressured, and more comfortable to create the art I wanted to make. So basically, my works are both allowed and forbidden works of art. It’s just the matter of the geographical location and determinism.⁴¹

⁴¹ Brentney Hamilton, “Wandered Lonely As A Cloud: Morehshin Allahyari’s The Romantic Self-Exiles at Oliver Francis Gallery”, *Dallas Observer* (April 13, 2012), <http://blogs.dallasobserver.com/mixmaster/2012/04/morehshin-allahyari.php>, 12 March 2013.

Martyna Bec

Babel

The inspiration for this work came from my experience of living in Berlin. I began to photograph the city by concentrating on its multicultural aspects, especially focusing on its black diaspora. Later on, however, I realized that the project constituted my self-portrait.



Fig. 1: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photo). Courtesy of the artist

Berlin is a unique place, different from any other German or European city. It offers a habitat to many cultures and subcultures. It is a city of curiosities and contrasts, which does not try to be accommodating. It only offers a strong allure. I don't know any other city that is so complex, with so many layers, ugly and beautiful at the same time.



Fig. 2: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photo). Courtesy of the artist

What primarily fascinates me is its ‘underground’ world, the world ‘under’ its surface, what we don’t see when visiting a European metropolis. Like a real subconscious of the city, this world is full of hidden colors, and of extremes, where phenomena appear in a movement that is difficult to grasp.



Fig. 3: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photo). Courtesy of the artist



Fig.4: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photo). Courtesy of the artist



Fig. 5: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photo).
Courtesy of the artist

In an effort to get to know this world, I encountered the people of the Black diaspora. This community finds its 'other life', another home, a 'territory' in Berlin. It is often the world of poor people, who live at the edge of the city, experiencing a poverty that has a double meaning. It is not only an economic condition; it implies an inability to adjust to a condition which, at the same time, brings the black immigrant to a 'schizophrenic' life, full of harm and mental pain. In Western terms, it could be called 'a life at the bottom', 'a life without morality'; still, the people who live this life try to behave according to their own rules and organizations, their ways of thinking and moving.



Fig. 6: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photos).
Courtesy of the artist



Fig. 7: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photos).
Courtesy of the artist



Fig. 8: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photos). Courtesy of the artist



Fig. 9: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photos). Courtesy of the artist

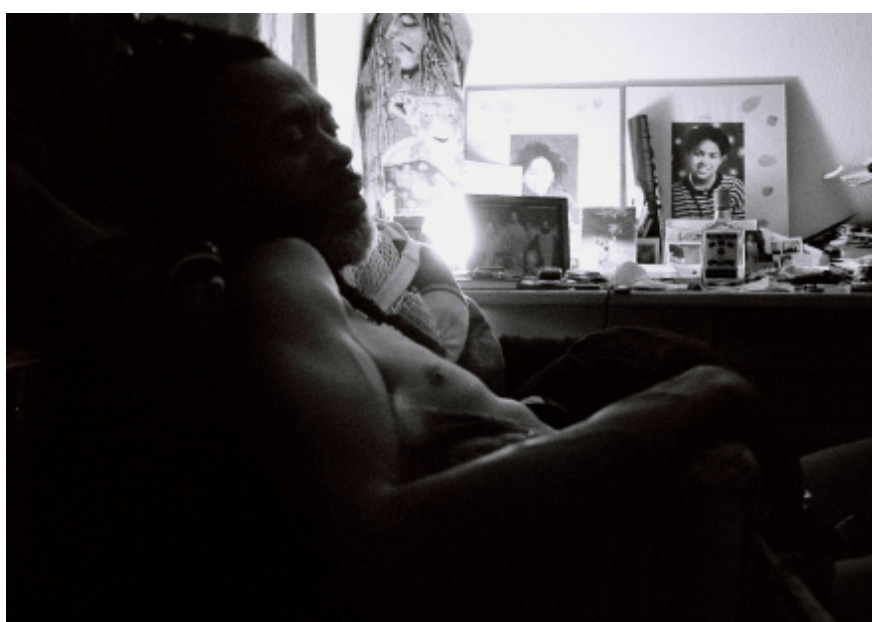


Fig.10: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photos).
Courtesy of the artist



Fig.11: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photos).
Courtesy of the artist

On one hand, it is a world of instincts; on the other hand, it is inhabited by spirits, ghosts, animistic and obsessed creatures. The people living in it search for a space where their desires can be fulfilled. They run families, trying to make music and art, and living the way they want to live. They belong to Berlin society, acting by its rules and bringing their qualities into it. At the same time, they produce forms of folklore that transform the city into a hybrid, which does no longer belong to Europe, and which, at the same time, does not belong to black culture either. This folklore is not meant in a traditional sense: it is a kind of spirituality, a way of thinking, a lifestyle, which, at least from a European perspective, does not fit in a common mentality, and which often leads to cultural and social misunderstanding.



Fig. 12: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photos).
Courtesy of the artist



Fig. 13: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photos).
Courtesy of the artist

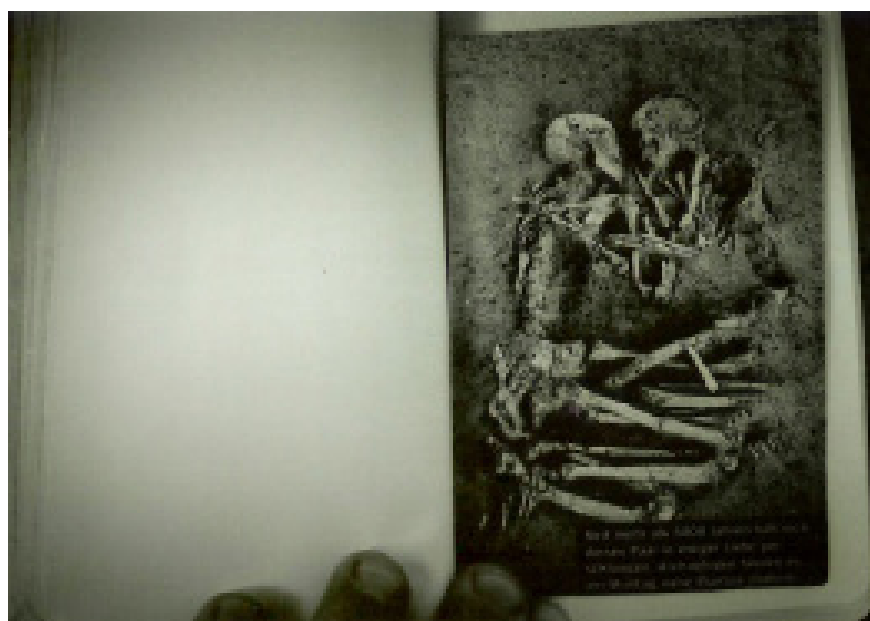


Fig. 14: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photos).
Courtesy of the artist

Gradually, in meeting these people and photographing their underground world, I began understanding that, as someone who is torn apart from her roots and homeland, who walks between invisible spirits, on the border of mental illness, sometimes choosing extreme solutions, I was working on the ‘stranger’ who is myself. I began asking myself: ‘How do we function in this world?’ ‘What is home? Is it a land, a people, a culture, or is it our own reality, our inner space?’ Diane Arbus once said: “The further we go, the closer to home we are”. I then decided to tell my story through the stories of the people I was photographing. With my images of ‘others’, I wanted to describe my own ‘homelessness’, the search for an identity that had already changed during my ‘journey’.



Fig. 15: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photos). Courtesy of the artist



Fig. 16: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photos). Courtesy of the artist

Photographie Féminine
Exile and Survival in the Photography of
Ana Mendieta, Donna Ferrato, and Nan Goldin

Introduction

This essay examines the politicization of domestic violence through women's photography, in particular, the photographs of Ana Mendieta, Donna Ferrato and Nan Goldin. The history of domestic abuse in the U.S.A. involves silencing battered women's private experience, and the suppression of the issue from public discourse. This essay considers the disciplinary nature of these silences around women's camerawork in Mendieta's installation series *Tableaux of Violence*, in Ferrato's documentary photo essay *Living with the Enemy*, and in Nan Goldin's self-portrait, *Nan One Month After Being Beaten*.

Mendieta's performance art has recently been taken up by feminist scholars because of the ways it has been excluded from exhibitions, while the minimalist sculpture of her husband and accused murderer, Carl Andre, enjoyed a firm presence in the museum system; yet, this scholarship is largely confined to Mendieta's brilliant *Siluetas* series. Ferrato's controversial images of domestic abuse were originally commissioned by Japanese *Playboy* and meant to capture a different editorial thematic – libertine love; the magazine viewed her images of domestic abuse as obscene and fired Ferrato, who was subsequently 'exiled' from publication. Goldin's self-portrait *Nan One-Month After Being Beaten* is under-theorized as a powerful commentary on battered women's temporality, and on their complex identity reflected through female masquerade.

American Studies professor Laura Wexler uses the term "photographic *anekphrasis*" to describe "an active and selective refusal to read photography – its graphic labor, its social spaces – even while, at the same time, one is busy textualizing and contextualizing all other kinds of cultural documents".¹ Wexler argues that photographic *anekphrasis* occurs within nineteenth-century histories of photography. I extend her analysis to what I think is a similar occurrence within contemporary feminist art history and criticism, that has either exiled scholarship on images of battered women from critical discussion by avoiding this important research area altogether, or by refusing to engage such discussion in multi-disciplinary debates. This is a form of photographic *anekphrasis* that has resulted in a missed opportunity to embark upon a critical project of understanding the *mutual* struggles over the female body in representation within the disciplines of feminist art history and criticism and critical legal theory and practice. I suggest that the practice of photographing battered women came into the world through the photography of an exiled form of feminist avant-garde that

¹ Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 58.

includes photojournalism. I consider Mendieta, Ferrato, and Goldin as ‘proto’ photographers of domestic abuse, whose work prefigured the official legal ways in which battered women’s bodies are made to ‘survive’ through the affirming capacities of the evidentiary photograph. Images such as those of Mendieta, Ferrato and Goldin have become the ‘bodies that matter’ in the courtroom adjudication of criminal charges of domestic violence.

Survival is defined in the West as: remaining alive after the death, cessation or occurrence of some thing; to survive means to endure or live through.² Trinh T. Minh-ha has observed that, in the genocidal aftermath of twentieth and twenty-first century political displacements, the “achievements of exile as an artistic vocation” are incomprehensible.³ As Minh-ha notes, often the exiled writer uses language to creatively and painfully assimilate the trauma of exile or displacement. Images of battered women, I propose, are one form of such assimilation, a *photographie féminine* conceptually linked to the literary mode of *écriture féminine*. Survival is an important thematic in the photographic and installation work of Mendieta, Ferrato, and Goldin. The notion has a temporal and autobiographical valence that is discursively linked to identity and psychoanalytic understandings of battered women’s subjectivity. I claim that the works of Ferrato, Mendieta and Goldin each contributed to the emergence of a genre of photography of battered women by producing these subjects as a particular temporal ‘look’ that survives by silently organizing courtroom adjudication of domestic violence, and by supporting services marketing campaigns around the issue. Images of battered women are the texts that assimilate privately experienced violence into the public domain of judgment. It is my contention that the work of these exiled women photographers *survives on* – albeit in multiple standardized forms – in state institutions, popular culture, and municipal spaces.

Each image pushes the ethical boundaries between art and legal evidence. In this way the politicization of domestic violence is a history written through feminist photography practices that contested the disciplinary domains of art and law. Claiming that images of battered women signify an exiled genre of photography, my discussion is an act of recovery of a kind of portrait image that transgresses the boundaries between art and evidence of law. By considering how the image of the battered woman moves into and out of art and legal practices, I inquire about the significance of feminist protest that critiqued the paucity of women’s art work at the Whitney Museum on the one hand and all but ignored the increasing numbers of incarcerated women and men, exposed to exile in the prison industrial complex often for crimes related to domestic violence. A similar institutional quandary emerges when we consider the position of anti-essentialist feminist art critics, who wanted to evacuate the female body from representation at the very moment violence against women came to the fore as a political issue adjudicated in U.S. courts precisely by circulating photographic images. In this context, I argue, the work of Ana Mendieta and Donna Ferrato and later, Goldin, remained off the radar because of their ethically challenging content and the disciplinary frames organizing feminist art work and writing.

² OED definition, paraphrased.

³ Trinh T. Minh-ha, “Other Than Myself, My Other Self”, in George Robertson et al., eds., *Travelers’ Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 28-42.

⁴ Images of Mendieta are photographs taken of her art installation, and thus constitute a portrait of her self portrait. Ferrato's image is caught in a mirror, and Goldin took her own picture.

⁵ Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 36.

My discussion proceeds along two axes: the first demonstrates how the photography of Ana Mendieta, Donna Ferrato and Nan Goldin gave presence to the figure of the battered woman in art and photojournalism in ways that are challenging to the ethics of art and legal disciplinary boundaries. Secondly, I suggest the ethical challenge born from their respective photographs as codifying the 'look' of battered women. Here, the conditions of production of photography in Mendieta, Ferrato and Goldin require an important clarification. Each of their works technically conforms to the self-portrait convention.⁴ The photographs are thus a "supplement of a supplement: a seemingly rigorous, visual, indexical marker of a body's having 'been there' before the camera/audience".⁵ Art and legal practices have placed the body in representation at the center of both disciplines in ways that reinforce and productively efface the distinction between legal photographic evidence and art object. In U.S. courts, contestation over domestic abuse criminal charges occurs over the photographic image; the image conditions the aesthetic experience of the courtroom for battered women, jurors and law professionals.

Situating Images of Battered Women within Feminist Art History Debates of the 1980s

Making this argument requires pivoting away from nineteenth-century scholarship on the invention of photography, and its role in promoting distinctions between the bourgeois individual and the deviant and criminal person through visual culture. This work, while foundational to the forthcoming arguments, has been heretofore preoccupied with the invention of the criminal mug shot.⁶ Instead, we must hone in on other enactments, production, and displays of the portrait image that cross the institutional boundaries between art and law in order to bring together the historiography on deviance and criminology and the debates about representation of women's bodies in art history and criticism.

The work of Amelia Jones is crucial to the development of images of battered women as a genre of photography that challenges the limits of legal evidence and art. In *Body Art: Performing the Subject*, Jones mapped feminist art intellectual history within a post-modern cultural politics. She examined the schism that occurred during the 1980s in art history and criticism in which the discipline witnessed a break-up between feminists who retained forms of essentialism to read the female body and subjectivity and an anti-essentialist position that refused a stable, knowable feminine ontology.⁷ This debate rhetorically organized feminist art criticism, establishing a problematic role of the body in feminist aesthetics.

The trajectory of the female body in art representation and performance illustrates the body's presence at the center of a major struggle toward and against exile within the discipline of art history and criticism. Although prominent feminist art historians during the 1980s located women's art collective associations within the larger cultural work of the women's movement, the artistic details of women's

⁶ For a study addressing the increasing dependence of contemporary adjudication of law on visual techniques of display in addition to the tradition of words, see Jonathan Finn, *Capturing the Criminal Image: From Mug Shot to Surveillance Society* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

⁷ Anti-essentialist feminist criticism, exemplified by the work of Mary Kelly and Griselda Pollock, rejected the representation of the female body in/as art. Particularly when the female artist deployed her own body in art representation and performance, the anti-essentialist view argued that it reified women's gender oppression by the male gaze.

experience were generally confined to motherhood, domestic labor and female masquerade. The political reality of violence against women seems to be handled symbolically through artwork and performance that critiqued the male obsession with the female nude in Western art and the misogynistic repudiation of the vagina and the menstrual cycle. Female beauty conventions and their commodification as pornography appear as another preoccupation. Criminality and mental illness were less explicitly discussed. All contributed to a repression of domestic violence in art history and criticism. Thus, a key problem I point to in this essay concerns how and why feminist critiques of the female artist and the art she produced and attempted to publicly exhibit, remained within the structure of the museum, gallery, and professional arts establishment. Guided by Marxist antipathy toward uncritical experiences of pleasure of the text, anti-essentialist feminist critics accused the female body artist of undermining herself (as an individual) and women (as a class), becoming, essentially, a fetish object commodified by the museum system.

Mary Kelly, Griselda Pollock, Sandy Flitterman and Judith Barry and others articulated this prominent mode of 1980s art history and criticism that rejected the representation of the female body in/as art in order for the spectator to apprehend the illusionary and ideological functions of representation.⁸ This resulted in several critical dismissals of women's body art and performance. The treatment of Hanna Wilke's early work is a prominent example. Accusations of narcissism read certain female body art performances as inchoate critiques of the structure of gender oppression. The anti-essentialist program that avoided representing the female body was visible in the work of Barbara Kruger and Mary Kelly.⁹

Meanwhile struggles occurred around publicly representing the battered woman in ways we currently take for granted. Today images of battered women are part of post-modern affective politics of the city; such images organize a variety of enclosed public spaces, creating official settings of moral decision-making and the contemplation of the same – what critical geographer Nigel Thrift has called “spatialities of feeling”.¹⁰ The U.S. courtroom is one form of Thrift's concept.¹¹ Recent scholarship on courtrooms has focused on the role of cameras and photography in the aesthetics of legal adjudication. The courtroom is a crucial archive of American domestic photography. Images of battered women function in the courtroom as a shadow archive because they problematize the history of sentimental and idealizing photography of the domestic sphere, offering instead a troubling and even gruesome view of domestic relations. They, however, differ from nineteenth-century images of domesticity in that primarily institutions, rather than private individuals, jealously cling to their meanings and movements. In this sense, photography of battered women functions within the shadow archive, while also participating in “a new age intent on producing various kinds of captivity through the cultivation of *atmosphere* or *presence* or *touch*”.¹²

My argument is that in Mendieta, Ferrato, and Goldin images marked pathways to the emergence of the genre of photography of battered women that are constitutive of our current affective politics and reasoning around domestic violence. I employ

⁸ See Griselda Pollock, “Screening the Seventies: Sexuality and Representation in Feminist Practice – A Brechtian Perspective”, *Vision and Difference: Femininity and the Histories of Art* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988); Judith Barry and Sandy Flitterman, “Textual Strategies: The Politics of Art-Marking”, *Screen*, 21.2 (1980), 35-48; Jane Roland Martin, “Methodological Essentialism, False Difference and Other Dangerous Traps”, *Signs*, 19.3 (1994), 630-657.

⁹ For a comprehensive survey of women's art from the 1970s through the 1990s, see Lucy Lippard, *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Feminist Essays on Art* (New York: The New Press, 1995). Lippard's commentary on Suzanne Lacy's “Auto: On the Edge of Time” is relevant to artistic production around domestic violence.

¹⁰ Nigel Thrift, *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

¹¹ For examples of how images of battered women are organizing medical and legal spaces, see Crystal Garcia, Sheila Suess Kennedy, and Barbara Lawrence, “Picturing Powerlessness: Digital Photography, Domestic Violence, and the Fight over Victim Autonomy”, *Hamline Journal of Public Law & Policy*, 25 (2003); Deborah White and Janice Du Mont, “Visualizing Sexual Assault: An Exploration of the Use of Optical Technologies in the Medico-legal Context”, *Social Science & Medicine*, 68 (2009), 1-8.

¹² *Ibid.*, 23 (emphasis original).

Derrida's concept of the "supplement" to theorize the effects of images of battered women that travel between the institutional milieus of art and law. As Wexler observes:

[b]ecause of what Sekula calls the 'shadow archive' is inseparable from the general archive, there are urgent questions to pose about the work of nineteenth-century white women portrait photographers. We need to know why and how each of these women made the *particular* portrait images she made and what kind of cultural consolidation her vision underwrote in the social formation to which they were addressed and into which they were accepted.¹³

¹³ Ibid., 182.

I would argue the same is true of twentieth-century women's photography in the Anglo-American tradition.

Ethical Challenges to Capturing Battered Women on Camera in Mendieta, Ferrato and Goldin

In addition to criticism of 1980s feminist art history debates, the commonalities between autobiography and photography are germane to my discussion of the exiled images by Mendieta, Ferrato and Goldin. Their photography each involved iterations of self-portraiture; thus, their images highlight the writerly aspect of autobiography and photography. Theater professor Deirdre Heddon refers to autobiography as "the graphed auto".¹⁴ Autobiography and photography both share the root, *graphie*, which usually concerns the written text. Philosophy professor Patrick Maynard has used "marking" to characterize the work of photography as a technology that reveals and conceals surfaces.¹⁵ Autobiography has a similar technical function of revealing and concealing the self, one that also tracks the representational and indexical elements of the photograph. As English professor Timothy Dow Adams notes, "[t]ranscription could apply as well to the way autobiography emphasizes the existence of its author, often including within the text examples of the autobiographical act."¹⁶ The self-portrait is an example of the autobiographical act. As I read the self-portraits of Mendieta, Ferrato and Goldin, the truth and fiction, art and evidence marked by their images, is the figure of the battered woman.

Autobiography is a coproduction between photographers and photographed. The work of Ana Mendieta, Donna Ferrato and Nan Goldin each performs autobiographical narratives across several visual media forms: photographs, solo performances, diaries and slide shows. As 'proto' photographers of battered women, they produce, with their images, autobiographical collaborations. Photographs and text constitute autobiographical acts in which photographer and battered woman collaborate. Often, the photographer and the photographed are the same person. In Mendieta, Ferrato and Goldin self-portraits thus emerge as social representations of battered women and the real law-enforcement agents who acquire evidence from them. Deirdre Heddon aptly specifies the relationship between autobiographical act and photography: "[t]he lived experience that pertains to a certain identity position

¹⁴ Deirdre Heddon, *Autobiography and Performance* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 11.

¹⁵ Patrick Maynard, *The Engine of Visualization: Thinking through Photographs* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 20. See also Timothy Dow Adams, *Light Writing, Life Writing* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2000), 225.

¹⁶ Adams, *Light Writing, Life Writing*, 21.

provides the foundation for the autobiographical act, but at the same time that foundation is strategically (and politically) unsettled *through* the autobiographical act.”¹⁷

The photographs I consider thus raise a number of problems regarding the representation of battered women, who in many ways have functioned as global feminism’s truly disadvantaged subjects. First, I argue that Mendieta’s, Ferrato’s, and Goldin’s photographs produced battered women in specific temporal moments, making the normal practice of violence against women chiefly legible through specific contexts and encounters with particular affective expressions that survive in contemporary legal practices. Their images produced the space and time in which battered women’s experience could be fixed. The challenges their photographic gazes present, then, implicate the common strategy of applying representational theories to the image. This tradition interprets the image, asking what a given photograph *means*. I suggest a non-representational approach to images of battered women that concerns what the photographs *do*, what they accomplish for battered women, for the courts, and for us, spectators.

Second, the creation of each of the photographs I discuss generates questions about the nature of complicity, and about what constitutes complicity in violence against women in a political moment organized by U.S. neoliberal discourses of self-help and the reinvigoration of the individual through privatization. Theft, aggression, and performances of appropriation have characterized the photographer as a parasite following his or her subjects over time and poaching images from the ‘hosts’ life witnessed behind-camera.¹⁸ It was Susan Sontag who pinpointed the complicity of the photographic process – photography’s maintenance of the status quo. In contrast, within the embedded photography of Ferrato, Mendieta and Goldin, the question of complicity in domestic violence emerged in different ways.

Ana Mendieta’s *Tableaux of Violence* refers to a series of mostly untitled actions performed indoors, on city streets and green spaces.¹⁹ The *Tableaux* installations disclosed a tension between two poles about the specularity of blood, one in which blood is figured as purely instrumental, a liberating primal force of vitality and another view in which blood is a means of repression and control through its confirmation of mortality.²⁰ Mendieta’s photographed performance series mimicked the *mise en scène* of police forensic investigation descriptions to the press of the murder of nursing student Sara Ann Otten. Mendieta reproduced the look of law’s surveillance of women’s bodies as a photographed work product that could masquerade as art object. Her work thus posed questions about the perception of violence in everyday settings, and about the possibilities of action taken in response to witnessing violence performed. Mendieta offered a glimpse of the psychological stakes of her endeavor in this piece when she explained, “I would really get it, because I was working with blood and my body. The men were into conceptual art and doing things that were very clean.”²¹ What punishment did Mendieta think she might bear and from whom in the aftermath of “Untitled (*Rape Scene*)” – part of the *Tableaux of Violence*? I would argue that the contours of

¹⁷ Heddon, *Autobiography and Performance*, 13.

¹⁸ Another example of the stakes of parasitism and photography, and the ethics of enunciating the subject of human rights, might be the case of South African photojournalist and “Bang-Bang Club” member Kevin Carter, who photographed a vulture surveilling a severely emaciated Sudanese girl mid-crawl. Carter left the scene after taking the image.

¹⁹ I borrow the series name from art historian and critic Julia Herzberg who addresses the series of performances as a collection similar to the *Siluetas* title. Performances lacking an official organizing title or theme are a testament to the critical preoccupation that has made legible and accessible the *Siluetas* series.

²⁰ Curator and author James Bradburne has argued that the specularity of blood includes the visualization of its magical qualities and its rational scientific examination. See his *Blood: Art, Power, Politics, and Pathology* (Munich, Germany: Prestel, 2002).

²¹ Guy Brett, “One Energy”, in Olga Viso, ed., *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body Sculpture and Performance 1972-1985* (Washington, D.C.: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution; Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2004), 181-202. See also William Wilson, “Haunting Works From Cuban Exile Mendieta”, *Los Angeles Times*, February 18, 1998.

²² Brett, "One Energy", 181-202; see also William Wilson, "Haunting Works From Cuban Exile Mendieta", *Los Angeles Times*, February 18, 1998.

²³ Though commissioned by *Playboy*, Ferrato's assignment to document libertine marital relations oddly fits within the genre of family portraiture, whose sentimentalism was popularized in the nineteenth century. *Playboy's* Japanese edition was created in 1975, and specialized in erotic images of national celebrities.

²⁴ Jay Prosser, *Light in the Dark Room: Photography and Loss* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2004), 163.

Prosser is Reader in the Humanities at the University of Leeds. His work on the body in representation intersects autobiography and photography studies; thus I refer to him here as a theorist of body narrative.

²⁵ For Derrida, the supplement may be interpreted in different ways; it is ultimately undecidable and ambiguous. See Jacques Derrida. *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

Mendieta's words were shaped by relations of affiliation among her fellow artists on one hand and the possibility of abjecting those relationships on the other by staging her dead bloodied body. Her words spoke to the fragility of the female body artist and the relationships of affinity that wrest her work from exile, creating an opening for many valences of survival. Mendieta risked something of herself in the *Tableaux of Violence* series that the *Siluetas* would only ghost in comparison.²²

Donna Ferrato's photography of domestic violence recalls another series of images in exile, photographed a decade after Mendieta's *Tableaux of Violence*. Ferrato's images were taken while she was on a photojournalism assignment to research and record on camera an example of the libertine for a photo-essay for Japanese *Playboy* magazine.²³ Instead, Ferrato's research devolved into witnessing the cyclical contours of domestic abuse in a family – Garth and Lisa, and their five children living in New Jersey. Ferrato produced a primal scene of domestic abuse in which Ferrato herself is captured in a mirror reflecting Garth hitting Lisa. It is an ideal image of domestic abuse as we see a by-stander both witnessing and capturing the event of violence on camera. The moment rendered in this image speaks to the heart of our contemporary desire and institutional contestation over images of battered women; it is the ideal image of the moment of violent contact that never (or, rarely) circulates in court. Ferrato's photography was a crucial, though largely ignored, instantiation of our desire for images of battered women as proof.

Ferrato's images were acquired through being embedded in Garth and Lisa's home. The resulting images of the couple's violent relationship were labeled obscene by Ferrato's publishers who fired her over the work. Ferrato subsequently published *Living with the Enemy*, a collection of diverse images of battered women that I argue functions as a palinode, an ode in reverse, to her documentary interaction with Garth and Lisa. Here, I draw on the concept of the "palinode" as elaborated by theorist of body narrative Jay Prosser:

The palinode is a doubling back, a return to the ode. Yet in recovering what the ode left out the palinode makes as its subject what should have been in the first. Indeed it goes back before the original. The palinode is take two but more authentic than take one. And as a return the palinode creates a new kind of text.²⁴

Or, in the language of Derrida, the palinode is a *supplement*, an assuredly undecidable one by virtue of its sheer existence.²⁵

Nan Goldin's portrait produced yet another aspect of battered women's temporality. Goldin's image of herself after being beaten prefigures the aesthetic conventions of state marketing campaigns for battered women's support services. Goldin's image offers another dangerous supplement concerning the reality of domestic violence. Through her self-portrait image, *Nan One Month After Being Beaten*, Goldin produces herself within battered woman's temporality – the stress between clock time and biological time that transforms the battered woman's image into criminal evidence upon its display. Yet, she also wears heavy cosmetics that are juxtaposed against her black eye. Goldin's explicit use of cosmetics creates

a compression between violence against women and female masquerade. *Nan One Month After Being Beaten* enacts *aletheia*,²⁶ the absence of forgetting, while, at the same time, suggesting a path for battered women to move past traumatic experience through masquerade – the very processes associated with women’s complicity and response to oppression. The self-portrait further complicates the relationship between complicity, witnessing, and survival, asking that feminists return to the role of photographic evidence in the current adjudication of gender violence.

Ana Mendieta: *Tableaux of Violence*

The *Tableaux*, executed in 1973, simulate police forensics in order to experiment with the casual viewer’s ability to read visual evidence of violence occurring in public. Mendieta used red paint and animal blood in the *Tableaux of Violence* series to stage her body around city spaces as a homicide victim. Such documentation included photographs of bystander’s reactions to the presence of blood in public settings.

“Untitled (*Rape Scene*)”, in particular, emphasized the intertext, exploring the relationship between official police knowledge, Mendieta’s body art performance, and the subsequent production of images by her colleague-spectators.



Fig.1: Ana Mendieta, *Untitled (Rape Scene)*. Still from *Tableaux of Violence*. Courtesy of Mendieta Estate

The photographs, which are the supplement of the performance, cannot claim truth. However, the repetition of the violent consumption of the female body, contributes to the repertoire of such images Lacan defined as the screen. For Lacan, the screen is the space of political contestation.²⁷ As Jones and others argued, dominant art history and criticism discourse in the 1980s focused on production, leaving explorations of subjectivity, the politics of identity, undertheorized. Mendieta brings both issues – subjectivity and production – to bear in the *Tableaux of Violence* of which “Untitled (*Rape Scene*)” makes the most direct link between violence and the private sphere.

²⁶ On the role of *aletheia* in Nan Goldin’s photography, see Nan Goldin and Eric Mézil, *Love Streams* (Paris: Galerie Yvon Lambert, 1997). However, for a systematic elaboration of the concept, see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York: [1927] 1996).

²⁷ See Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1987).

²⁸ Patrick Anderson, *So Much Wasted: Hunger, Performance and the Morbidity of Resistance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 93.

²⁹ See John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988); Sandra S. Phillips, Mark Haworth-Booth and Carol Squires, *Police Pictures: The Photograph as Evidence* (San Francisco, California: San Francisco Museum of Art, Chronicle Books, 1997). Jonathan Finn, *Capturing the Criminal Image: From Mug Shot to Surveillance Society* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Herzberg, in Viso, ed., *Ana Mendieta*, 256, n. 60.

Performance theorist Patrick Anderson argues that body art, though explicitly designated as aesthetic production, exceeds that designation as performance.²⁸ Mendieta's staging of the abused woman who is consumed through violence, appears as a recorded crime scene, a counter-part to the criminal mug shot whose iconic status emerged during the nineteenth century. Several scholars have traced modern developments of representing criminals through police photography.²⁹ *Tableaux of Violence* is an important counter-point to literature on police photography and surveillance because it emphasizes the subjectivity of the attacked.³⁰

Mendieta's installation lasted approximately one hour. Her pose in the staged scene conformed to how the crime was reported in the press. Invited to her apartment, Mendieta's colleagues found her door ajar. In an exploration of the durational aspects of performance, the artist's prone, half naked and bloodied body produced a most interesting response from her audience: the scene was photographed, and Mendieta's colleague-guests began to discuss the piece; these events resonate with police and forensic teams arriving at a murder scene to evaluate material evidence. Mendieta staged the abused woman's body using her own. The rehearsal, in her home of the violent struggles of an in-home attack and murder, has multiple affective valences that become a study of women's subjectivity produced through violence. Her work in *Rape Performance* was unannounced (as were a few others of the *Tableaux* series), and this element contributed to the realization of the 'live' through physical endurance. Herzberg notes that there is no evidence that these works were seen by anyone.³¹ In this way, the photography of Mendieta's body art installations, the supplement of the supplement, masquerades as police evidence. Simulation troubles the way in which evidence structures the adjudication of domestic violence. The documentary photography of the *Tableaux* explores subjectivity *and the conditions of production* of the art object, critical approaches at odds with each other in art critical discourses of the 1980s and 1990s.

Donna Ferrato: *Living with the Enemy*

³² See Carol Squires, *Body at Risk: Photography of Disorder, Illness and Healing* (New York: International Center of Photography; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Ken Light, *Witness in Our Time: Working Lives of Documentary Photographers* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000); Christian Caujolle and Mary Panzer, *Things as They Are: Photojournalism in Context Since 1955* (London: World Press Photo, 2005).

Ferrato's images, for their part, have few interlocutors and respondents.³² The few commentaries on her work address Ferrato's subsequent book, *Living with the Enemy*, released a decade after her unpublished magazine piece with Garth and Lisa. The photographs – which pushed the limits of research, performance and ethnography – survive in this book of documentary photographs of battered women's lives. As a palinode, Ferrato's images perform the ambiguity of the supplement through a double movement, highlighted by Jay Prosser: an author returns to the original not to retract or reject the first text, but rather to confirm a loss in the original that the new second text helps teach. *Living with the Enemy* is a representation of Ferrato's learning. As such it too becomes available for interpretation, for a litany of returns.

In 1993, an image that appears in *Living with the Enemy* was used by Eva Rivera Castro in a group show called "The Subject Rape" at the Whitney Museum of



Fig. 2: Donna Ferrato, still from *Living with the Enemy*. Courtesy of the artist



Fig. 3: Donna Ferrato, still from *Living with the Enemy*. Courtesy of the artist

American Art. The image of a boy screaming at his father, as he is being arrested for beating the child's mother, was incorporated into a collage by Castro, who did not credit Ferrato's copyrighted image. Castro's appropriation raises interesting questions not only about copyright in the area of feminist photography, but also about the ethics of representation of battered women – an issue Ferrato was clearly intimately aware of. Discussing the "The Subject of Rape" collage, Ferrato pointed out that "[t]hese women [photographed for *Living with the Enemy*] agreed to release their photographs because they knew how the photographs were going to be used ... they didn't know that the images were going to wind up on a piece of art in the Whitney Museum in a show about rape."³³ Interestingly, Ferrato's editor also observes that the women in *Living with the Enemy* are described as victims of domestic abuse, not rape. Castro's incorporation of the images into

³³ William Grimes, "A Question of Ownership of Images", *The New York Times*, Friday August 20, 1993.

a show about rape asks us to ponder domestic violence in terms of erotics, a set of affective flows that open out to a variety of gestures and relations of force. Her appropriation of Ferrato's images suggests the ways in which Ferrato's gaze codified the ideal 'look' of domestic abuse and the battered woman, in particular.

Nan Goldin: *Nan One Month After Being Beaten*

The self-portrait photograph, queer theorist Akiko Shimizu argues, is a mode through which identity may survive and/or be subversive.³⁴ Goldin's self-portrait as a victim of violence is an instance in which battered women's subjectivity is given a space to survive through the portrait image. The self-portrait was taken in 1984, just two years after Ferrato's chronicles of Garth and Lisa.³⁵ Goldin's self-portrait is a close-up depicting two black eyes she received from her boyfriend. The white of one eye is filled with blood and the intensity of the red is matched by Goldin's application of radiant lipstick. The viewer is asked to consider the truth of violence against women – the privacy of wounds received – against the public ruse of cosmetics. The lipstick, coupled with the swollen and bruised skin of Goldin's face, conjures the work of gender masquerade theorized by Joan Riviere where the use of cosmetics is a form of Camp enabling women to publicly neutralize their capacity for male castration.³⁶ Extending Riviere's logic, the bruises left on Goldin's face are a trace of her boyfriend, his act of violence through which he "neutralized" female aggression. In this reading, then, Goldin's application of her radiant red lipstick performs a Camp upon Camp. Both markings, the co-presence of bruise and rouge may thus be seen as battered woman's mask eternally vacillating between authenticity and artificiality, pride and shame.

Nan One Month After Being Beaten details the role of gender masquerade in women's biography, and the discourses of beauty and cosmetics that shape strategies of feminist art practices.³⁷ Goldin's portrait is an autobiographical attempt to reconcile her sense of self after a violent attack; the pain of which Elaine Scarry has so beautifully argued, unmakes the world of the attacked.³⁸ Goldin's self-portrait, then, reveals as it conceals, capturing the indeterminacy of her figuration as a battered woman. In this way, the image returns us to feminist critiques of the lone male artist's body that achieves transcendent coherence through action painting and performance.³⁹ Amelia Jones is an important force arguing that the radical narcissistic practices of posing by female body artists demonstrated a rejection of the possibility of any subject achieving transcendence; she illustrates how feminist artists explore the contingency of the body/self. Similarly Goldin's self-portrait brings into conceptual alignment the sexualization of women and the destruction of their corporeal integrity through violent force. The specularity of blood *in* Goldin's skin and eyes is matched by the cosmetics *on* her face. Thus, in addition to ideas about the body in performance and the rhetoric of the pose, interpretive frames discussed at length by Jones, Nan Goldin's self-portrait incites a reading of the skin's surface, the irregularities of its compromised tissues, and judgments

³⁴ Akiko Shimizu, *Lying Bodies: Survival and Subversion in the Field of Vision* (New York & Washington: Peter Lang, 2008).

³⁵ Another version of the image appears in Goldin's 1992 exhibition, entitled *Désordres*, at Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume.

³⁶ Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as a Masquerade", in Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan, eds., *Formations of Fantasy* (London and New York: Methuen, 1986), 35-44

³⁷ *Nan One Month after Being Beaten* is submerged by discussions emphasizing the visual culture of punk and other lifestyles that are coded as different or counter-cultural. I read a single self-portrait by Nan Goldin in order to shift her work in this self-portrait from critical exile.

³⁸ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

³⁹ See Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject*. In particular, Jones discusses the criticism of Harold Rosenberg and Hans Namuth's photography of Jackson Pollock to develop her point about the "Pollockian Performative."

about battered women's identity. The image proposes a close reading or perusal of the flesh as bare life that mimics the now common practice of juries using photographic evidence to adjudicate domestic assault court cases. Here Goldin's self-portrait survives – supplements – in the form of visual evidence of domestic violence, the shadow archive of all women's representation in the visual arts.

Conclusion

Exiled from critical inquiry and reproduction, art historians, cultural critics and legal theorists alike have not lingered long upon these images of Nan Goldin, Donna Ferrato, and Ana Mendieta. The work of these women, though largely ignored, has nonetheless played a crucial role in the politicization of domestic violence and the visualization of battered women. Formulated as a problem of institutional milieu, we see in Mendieta's exiled images a critical emphasis placed on her most publicized work – the *Siluetas* series – and not the 'juvenilia' she produced in art school – the *Tableaux of Violence*, discussed in this essay. Ferrato, for her part, was a photojournalist whose work did not occupy the space of art history during the 1980s. Finally, Goldin's self-portrait photography, emerging during the 1990s, was subsumed in the visual politics of the punk movement. Critical writing on feminist art practices fosters a capacity within those art objects to travel in alternative institutional milieus; the result is survival stored as exile's potential energy.

Mendieta, Ferrato and Goldin each politicized the question of violence against women by producing images of domestic abuse outside official networks of police investigation. Art curator and media theorist Ariella Azoulay has proposed that the exchange of traumatic images calls into being a "citizenry of photography" who obligate themselves through the demands of a "civil contract" to bear witness to violence, to discuss the Realpolitik they capture even if that is all one can immediately do.⁴⁰ For Azoulay, the controlled exclusivity with which state corporate media circulates war and crime scene photography constitutes a hegemonic framing of the political. The untitled art installation of Ana Mendieta, suppressed photojournalism of Donna Ferrato, and under-theorized self-portraiture of Nan Goldin offered a counter-hegemonic framing of state representations of domestic violence. The photographs enact Jane Blocker's concept of *seeing* witness, drawing our attention to the mediatization of cultural knowledge and laws about violence against women. Through *photographie féminine* these women see witness, light-writing their bodies into the image of abused women. In this way, their portraits encourage us to ask how photographic evidence negotiates controversy about battered women's behavior, which is often marked by resistance and refusal to participate in legal action.

⁴⁰ Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008).

Josefina Báez

Dominicania



Fig 1: Josefina Báez, screen still from *Dominicania*, 2012. Courtesy of the artist. Click on the image to watch the video.

Dominicania is a series of videos that accompany the text written by Josefina Báez and entitled *Levente no. Yolayorkdominicanyork* (New York: I Om Be Press, 2012).

I have been migrating since birth. In fact, migration first comes
visible exactly at birth.
As a matter of fact, nine months before my happy birthday to me,
to her, to him, to them,
to here, to there,
I was migrating too.
Migrating from a place with no time
and colorless passport;
to a place with no time and colorless passport.
And nine months and some days, I was seeing multiplying cells in
my mother's IMAX womb.
Birth day they call it. Day of birth.
That's a fact.
Optimum migrare. Sounds latin. Ah!
Migrant. Migrate. Migraine.
Migrant migraine
Migraine, my grains.
My grains in greener pastures.

Sounds familiar ah!
Migration rapidly wrapped all my existence.
I move from second to minutes to hours to days to weeks to
months to years and years and years. Migrating every day. Day to
night.
To too many places I have arrived.
From many places I have left.
Heaven, purgatory or earth.
All ask the same questions:
Where are you from?
When are you leaving?
Where are you going?
Like if a “place” would be the thing.
What about if I tell you that
I am that place –
where I am,
come from,
and will definitely leave*

* Josefina Báez, *Comrade, Bliss
Ain't Playing* (New York: Ay
Ombe Theatre / I om be Press,
2008), 78-80.

Of Identity and Other Mere Feelings:
An Interview with Josefina Báez

Translated from Spanish by **Madeline Nelson**

Josefina Báez is a contemporary performer, founder and director of the Ay Ombe Theatre. She is the author of several texts, the most recognized of which are *Dominicanish* (2000) and her latest, *Comrade, Bliss Ain't Playing* (2008). Báez's works accentuate the diasporic condition of Dominicans in the United States. Known as a Dominicanyork artist, she addresses issues of hybridity through performance texts that explore the particularities of her Dominicanness, race and creativity. Through her artistic methodology, *The Anthology of Performance*, the autobiographical is not just a personal reference, it becomes a process, a technique, that mixes popular culture, literature, theatre, music, spirituality and the socioeconomic reality of the actor or actress that exerts it. The following conversation is an edited transcription of a recorded interview Báez completed on October 26, 2012, while attending the International Conference on *Diasporas and Race* at Wake Forest University, North Carolina, USA.

KB: Josefina, this interview, for me, is an opportunity to get to know you better, and in the process of getting to know you, learn a little more about myself.

JB: hmmm

KB: Sometimes working in places where one has no interaction with his or her own people can be very solitary. And one's own cultural conversation... it's as if it were to shut down. So one turns to books, to different mediums in order to try to keep it current and alive. I am therefore going to ask you questions in order to get to know you and your work... also to be able to expand, a bit more, my own intellectual world which is my work.

KB: Ok, let's start with the first question. Tell me about your life in the Dominican Republic.

JB: Do you want it in Spanish or English?

KB: We'll do it in Spanish and English, if it doesn't matter to you. I believe I'll flow better in Spanglish.

JB: In Spanglish, perfect.

KB: As I said, tell me a little bit more about your life in the Dominican Republic, your pre-diasporic life, your childhood in La Romana.

JB: I was born in La Romana. I believe that I was raised in a *Romana conscience* at all times. So, I came in 1972, I was twelve years old. I was a typical little Dominican girl, working class, mother a widow, and my father died when I was one. A typical picture of the working class. Being the last, I had the opportunity to go to very good schools. That... is very important for the working class – you know? To give their children a good education. So I arrived in New York in 1972, and there wasn't a huge transition because for a little girl what is important is that you are with your family. It's not that there was a New York and a Dominican Republic. I was with my family here and I was with my family there. So I didn't see it as a big deal, being in *another country*, or anything like that. Although, of course, we cooked the same as in La Romana, but that type of thing tasted different. But in truth, talking about this from the perspective of a diasporic childhood – would be like pulling teeth. But, yes, I believe that what gives you security at that age is family, my mother, my brothers. Then that's what I had.

KB: When you arrived here, where did you live?

JB: In Manhattan, at 109th and 107th street, Central Park.

KB: How was your introduction to the education system in the United States? Did you go to a school where you took bilingual classes?

JB: Bilingual classes for a very short time and, afterward, immersion. I went back to the Dominican Republic to finish eighth grade, because according to my mom and my family, it was important... to solidify my Spanish, and eighth grade was very important there. They told me they were going to teach me very well there, and it was true.

KB: Oh yes, very good.

JB: Yes. So...at that time I already had more of an awareness of... not the literature, but the grammar. That experience was very, very important for me.

KB: Did you always communicate in Spanish at home?

JB: At home, yes. With my brothers no, but... yes, in my house I had to speak Spanish.

KB: When did you arrive in the United States? Tell me, how was that transition of leaving the Dominican Republic and arriving in the United States. How did you

see it from your point of a view as a little girl, this new reality? Very different from Santo Domingo?

JB: In my house we lived as if we were in La Romana. In school I lived the little moments that I experienced outside... so I lived this other thing. And I saw that the little girls, they all looked like me. And I told myself, look how strangely they speak, they speak their English. But they all looked like me, and I did not see much of a difference. I remember vividly... we arrived in November and my brother, Gogy, took me to Central Park and said to me, "Breathe." So he says to me, "You're smoking so young!" And I, *Me? No! I'm not smoking!* It was only because it was so cold. That for me was like *wow*. Those little every day things, you know? At that time it snowed a lot, so I went to school with snow up to my knees, with long socks, with hair buns... I don't know. My mom didn't accept things like pajama parties, sleepovers.... So I was a very odd kid in the school, in the group, but there were other girls who were going through the same thing. Recently we have found each other and we laugh a lot about those times.

KB: Perfect. When did you begin to write? Why and for whom?

JB: I've been writing since La Romana. I wrote stories, because at the school I went to... it had a good program that did not focus specifically on literature, but it gave me quite a good base. So, yes, I wrote stories, I liked to write unusual stories... stories where I imagined the priest or the nun, I don't know, doing everything. A little disorganized, no? Or the teacher that bothered me, well, I imagined her in the bathroom, you know? It was games like these. So there were a few contests at school for the day of Duarte... and that type of thing I liked. I wrote a lot of bad poetry, and now I have seen it and oh, how horrible. I had a period when I believed I had to write the *Mio Cid*. It was... as if I looked to write an epic poem.... Now I've found...those shoeboxes where I put my texts and... I have laughed a lot... about those beginnings... with things that are valid.

KB: Of course, of course.

JB: I always wrote... like all young girls, you know? Like a secret journal, writing things that one believes no one else thinks... before I came here I passed by the first library I went to in New York, on 100th street, in my Judy Bloom era and all of that type of thing that... I read as a little girl. At that time, I had people that invited me to read... more than write. And that was very, very beautiful.

KB: Great.

JB: It wasn't like I thought of being a writer, or anything like that. I went along with it. It is interesting that now writing is my way of life. It's not something separate.

KB: Sure, a continuation of your being.

JB: Yes. Exactly, of everything. It flows... my being flows.

KB: Which of the Dominican diasporic writers attracts you more? And why?

JB: That's very difficult, you know? Because last night¹ I started to talk about what we have... different leagues, in which everyone works. So...I don't know if someone who I like considers him or herself part of a diaspora. I don't know, like, Norberto James.

¹ Báez read and acted out her long poem, *Comrade, Bliss ain't playing*, as part of a plenary session for the international conference on *Diasporas and 'Race'* at Wake Forest University (25-27 October, 2012).

KB: Well, what is diaspora for you?

JB: For me, Norberto James' work is formative and he lives here in the United States... I don't know if he considers himself part of a diaspora, but for me he is vital. Vital vital vital. I like the word *diaspora*. I like it because many people criticize it. I like it because it isn't accepted. I like it because... it is what one wants to call him or herself, like immigrant.

KB: What do you see the people criticizing about the diaspora? How do you see people understanding diaspora versus what you understand?

JB: I was in the Dominican Republic and... they were interviewing me... someone... said to me, "You are using the wrong word". And she began to look for the definition of the word *diaspora*. You can find me all the dictionaries. What I want to call myself depends on me. Whether it is accepted or not, in the canon of the Royal Academy. In other words, what I want to call myself. It's my name.

KB: The words are alive. They evolve...

JB: Exactly, exactly. So yes I like it, I like it... I belong to the diaspora... that has to do with a league. The people that create it are from a working class. I belong to the people that come from there, and so my league, quote unquote, is small. It has to do with a limited resource... with a community. The people that are from my class are not going to see my things. Possibly because... they prefer... an expression that comes more from the Dominican Republic. This is what... is always done... and is normal. The comedians come from the Dominican Republic, the musicians come, and the writers come from the Dominican Republic. So that is a league. It is very interesting that my class, the one I belong to here and there... here it is closely linked to the literary work of the Dominican Republic. And they write mainly in Spanish, so... what writer excites me... attracts me... there are many layers. I read a lot of poetry. I like the genre a lot! Of course... what comes from the Dominicans... I am going to read it... because of solidarity... and because I

learn a lot about how we all weave the same topic. I don't know, the case of Junot is vital for me. It's vital because I like how he weaves. I like the use of his... topics. How he addresses it, his form of organizing his thoughts... to me it seems brilliant. So... it is another league. You know I have the great blessing of him having taken his time to read my text, and I know that he does not have the time and that in that league there are other requirements, you know?

KB: James. Why James? Why does this author attract you so much?

JB: It's that he's similar to me; he is one of the first poets that I read in the Dominican Republic. I believe that his poem, "The Immigrant", is the poem that breaks me and shapes me the most. Look, saying it... it makes me like this... [pointing at goosebumps on her skin]. It breaks me, it breaks me. I don't believe that I've said it to him sufficiently, how important it is. I had the great joy of reading with him at the same table in England... and I was behaving like a total groupee. At a table of Dominicans, this man, Nestor and I. And when James reads his poem I start to cry, and then it's my turn, and the people look at me as if I'm doing something wrong, you know? And I was like... no, let me cry, it's my turn, I am going to read, but let me cry, don't control me. And I heard him say, "That's my wingman". For me it is formative, his work is formative and it continues being very vital.

KB: How, from your point of view, do the Dominican readers receive him and his work?

JB: Oh I don't know... I have no idea, no idea. No, I can't talk much about anything or anyone. I spend a lot of time in tiny things, if I get involved in that... mmm... I don't have a lot of time to do a lot of things, and it would also be unjust. I have no idea.

KB: Let's see...

JB: I believe I missed something in the question you asked me.

KB: I think you answered it. Are you referring to which diasporic authors you read? We are going to return to this because these questions keep resurfacing. As readers, we know what Josefina Báez says about her characters. Right? What would the character "La Kay" highlight about Josefina Báez if she were the writer?

JB: Well, precisely, that character has a blog, and in that blog, she talks about me. So I am called the biologist of the keyboard; she has a piece of the biology, and wow! When the keyboard biologist, I, am traveling and I am in remote places where I can't access the blog... "La Kay" complains and says: "Ahh because she is an artist, the biologist...". We always have some problems and I, [referring to

what she says to “La Kay”] *Please stop being a Levente*² [laughs]. This character, who we made a blog for before publishing the book, has continued because she has to continue her life instead of being confined to the same book.

² A person who can be lazy, witty, and bold.

KB: And a lot of people read the blog?

JB: We have more than twenty thousand people that read the blog.

KB: Interesting!

JB: Yes, it is interesting how the people react because the character, “La Kay,” doesn’t filter. She says something, it has a stimulus and she reacts, reacts, reacts. So that has been quite interesting to work with that. “La Kay” has within the piece the different forms of thinking about the people that I know, my people. Let’s say, for example, the topic of the economy, politics, the Dominican-Haitian topic, there are people that disagree, but everyone lives in “El Nie”³, and that part has rooted me and has taught me to work more with differences. [Laughs]. “La Kay” is some “character” [Laughs].

³ The perineum.

KB: This language that you expose, the colloquial, daily life, is in itself an artistic medium. Spanglish is a clear element of that reality. Is this only an instrument of your work or does it have another importance for you?

JB: Oral history. I come from a family, I imagine that all of the working class families are like this, where orality is very strong, here there is literature that isn’t written down, where it is learned and communicated with different layers, because of that orality. So for me, perhaps in my work that’s the base, but every job of mine exudes it in a different form. *Bliss* has that also, but it is exuding beauty or is working in silence, but it comes from that base because that base is I, I am that base of oral history, I am that base of the working class.

KB: So that working class, already being here in the United States, is transformed into a reality of transition in which these two languages balance themselves, English and Spanish, right?

JB: It is enriched, but it continues being the working class. Other things are added to it, the worker, the immigrant, the conception of color from this point of view, from this experience that is different, that becomes more complex – not better or worse, but more complex.

KB: Yes, I’m asking you this question because, for example, in a conference that took place last week, here at Wake Forest University, they asked if Julia Alvarez was truly a Dominican writer, how much of her work was Dominican literature

when it is written in English and mixed a little with Spanish. So here, what there is, is a perception that identity is formed from a specific language, and you, for example, are *the queen*... of entering and leaving from a language. So, you represent a problem for the people that think that identity is formed from language. So, what do you answer to the people that bring up a thing like this?

JB: That they write from their purity, that they work in that, that they don't lose their time with me, with what doesn't interest them... I am not a little piece of golden money. Mine is a very personal investigation, and for me this is a reality, it enriches me to know the syntax, the grammar of these languages, and break it. And to play and create another nonsensical syntax, or another line that has to do with space. Or to play with the structures of the Vedic chants. Life, the world, the literary world, the literary culture of the world [referring to what interests her]. So it is my journey as an artist, it is my journey being human. So this, to me, makes me a better person. But the people can say what they want, because they are saying it from their experience. That is very true. I remember when I wrote *Bliss*, the people that accept Spanglish would say... "But now what do I do with you, because now this text is only in English!" Now all of my theory about Josefina Báez, it has gone away. Every job is different. Every job demands something from you. I always work three jobs at the same time, that are in different levels of... of... of its process. There is one that is recently beginning and another that is in editing and another that is in investigation. So, to me, it supports me, because I am hyperactive and I get bored with things, and because I dedicate a lot of hours a day to this. So, it's all a structure to keep me focused. So it is a system that I created, for me, because it's what I need in order to work. But this large conversation about... about what is Dominicanness? What is Dominican literature about? It is a definition of every Dominican writer. And the critic is going to critique from his theoretical framework and is going to enter and leave, but not very often, writers are asked, like it is customary to do now: "And you, what do you think about this?" Because at the end of the day, you are the one making this thing of yours. There is a dialogue. So, the same here and there. In Spain, there is a young person that is making a dialogue, presenting a work about "La Levente", and she had to quote in English. And someone stopped it and said to her that she had to translate that because that isn't good Dominican literature and well... This woman writes like this. First I have to cite... the... the...

KB: The text...

JB: The text as it is, after I have the translation, well you have put up with it because that's the way it is. So, the reference that comes from this picture, this framework, of how I should be. What that allows me to say is that we are very far from being a humanity that can work in dialogue with differences. More than the definition, my constant question in all of my work, when I teach in my school, is always, what do

you do with differences? My movement... what do you do with that? You reject it, I am saying that what you do is neither good nor bad. The only thing I am saying is... what do you do? Because it is what teaches me. What I do with differences, what I do when I see a person of another color that isn't mine. A person that doesn't talk like that, that doesn't eat what I eat. What do I do with that? What does it produce in me? So perhaps that is the question; that will be the summary of my guidance.

KB: Very good. Your work is about a very complicated subject, and we have already talked a little bit about that, identity. A subject, not only tricky and changing, but also dangerous, because for some, identity is a sacred thing that they defend, even as far as violence, if it is precise or necessary. How do you understand identity? Why is it such a recurring theme in your work?

JB: Hmm. What you say, changing, is the word as well as... it... fits me, it fits me. In *Bliss*, there is, in that journey of investigation, in the creative process, a result that identity is a mere feeling. And I remember reading it in the university, to a specialist in African literature, a theater specialist that got annoyed, "It can't be, it can't be..." He said. Well, did I just put your work in a questionable spot? [Laughs] So, well, that I like. [Laughs].

KB: Breaking norms.

JB: I don't do this work saying that I am going to break norms; it is my process. And what I have to do is be authentic for Josefina. I have to be satisfied, I have to do this because my audience is the only one that demands that I am honest; they don't demand that I'm good. That's why I don't think about my public before writing. Whoever wants to buy me buys me. Whoever wants to see me goes to my theater. I can't be... my audience, I respect them so much... I trust their light. They are going to like it or they aren't going to like it, but that isn't personal. And if it is personal, look, it is not going to take my life away either. So, for me, that is very important. I know that in writing schools, creative writing, it is an important thing. Who is this text written for? A creative text! And I remember that they have invited me to teach, to co-teach and this... so all of the norms that the students are being taught, and Josefina arrives with *authenticity, being genuine, your truth*, and my friends are looking at me like this... If you write for a market, yes. I don't write for a market, I work a very tiny thing. It's like a sort of tiny batey⁴. I decided that this is what I want. My life, my world is incomplete and constant. I chose that. I chose that.

⁴ A poor neighborhood adjacent to a sugar cane field.

KB: Perhaps because you escape through the fingers of criticism.

JB: No, I have excellent critics. I have had the great blessing of working for many years with some investigators... scholars that have followed my work and... that taught me so much, to see my work in another form. To have a dialogue with my work. Uh...

⁵ A popular genre of Dominican music often characterized by a romantic or nostalgic tone.

⁶ A form of Dominican music and dance with an accelerated

what bothers them? What do they find? Now with *Bliss*... this girl that translated it to Portuguese. When you began, it reminded me a lot of that, because she said that translating *Bliss* was translating herself. And she began to work the theory of delicateness with the text, with the beauty. Also, we, the blacks and Dominicans, we have that. I am nothing more than Bachata⁵, I am nothing more than Merengue⁶, or my Merengue also includes that *Bliss*. So... uh... for me, my most revolutionary text is *Bliss*, because it bothers the academics a lot. God... but... “Where’s the free Josefina?” And the people also like, “I dare you, you know, to write in English, just in English, you know”. So I have a fascination with this text because it reflects who I am now at fifty-something years old. This journey has a lot to do with the text and, now, learning to put it on stage is the great schooling of mine. So that’s what my journey is about.

KB: I don’t like to utilize the word *consolidate*, but it sounds like *Bliss* has consolidated that space of yours. It isn’t easy, it isn’t easy in the sense that you are searching beyond what is a unique Josefina. You are looking for what are the different Josefinas. Because of questions they asked you in your performance yesterday, I realized that although we give ourselves to the work of investigating what is different, marginal...

JB: Yeah, right...

KB:... changing, eh... we don’t accept each other. We take the definition of things a lot more seriously.

JB: Yes, the theory can trap marginality. In a way, it has trapped it in many, many instances and it has trapped writers. And... I have a friend that told me... and he said it in public and it is recorded, that he writes texts, some texts for academia. So he already knows what scholars want, so he writes it and they leave him alone, and he does his thing. And I... *But how, how is it possible that you are going to do that to me!* And he tells me, “Yes, that’s what you’re missing. You are always genuine and in your journey. No. No. That’s why no one publishes you”, and he’s right. But I publish my own work and there isn’t a problem. But it’s true, although that can’t be my problem. To each his own. My job has to be that, every day, being myself. Because I have made myself a better person doing this. I am getting to know myself better, I am getting to know what I am, what all of those layers are. So that’s what it’s about, at least my journey.

KB: I am going to ask you a question a little from the position of the people that would criticize your approach. Does Josefina Báez exoticize the cultures with which she has a dialogue? For example, Hindu or Asiatic.

JB: I don’t know. It depends on who sees it. I didn’t approach the Asiatic culture in order to dedicate myself to that culture. I arrived, at least to the dance, to learn a little thing, I was doing a party for my guru. I have a spiritual teacher. So I went for

some very personal reasons that didn't have to do with my literature or my dance. At that time my guru died. I continued working more because of that. In my work I have a theory and an approach, that dance from *Dominicanish* has a lot to do with the biomechanics of theater in the form of what uses energy. So from the outside they can see an exoticism, but I know what is happening in terms of energy, of the quality of the energy that is another thing and is my investigation as a dramatist. So they are always going to say that. It's not important. But they can ask me, and I'm going to tell them why. One of the examples in the biomechanics of theater is going up and going down. If your action goes forward... your strength has to go in the opposite direction. That dance from India is the same. So, I make a dialogue with two techniques. Regardless of where they come from. They are techniques that I dedicated a lot of time to. They are techniques that I still study today. I know what I got myself into. And I know how rude I am and I can say, *I paid for that*, in order to bother people. I paid for it, I paid for that. If you don't want to sell your things, don't sell them. But what happens is that, if Halle Berry goes, who is black, they aren't going to say anything to her even if she is exoticizing. But if it is a little Dominican girl from La Romana, poor, well there is a problem. So that's the thing, that's why I am so rude. And I leave it halfway. And I leave it halfway. But if they follow me... I say something in order to provoke. I say you guys sold and I bought it. If there is someone that has common sense, beginning to tell me, "Well, explain yourself..." So I explain and I say that it has to do with class and where I come from. Because I know people that don't dedicate the time. There went *some professor from Europe* and they are allowed to, but Josefina Báez, no. They criminalized me in the eighties. Criminalized! I did *Dominicanish* because I dedicated that to my guru, and I had to do that for me. But, please, please. So, the people are going to say what they want and you know that? I do what I want. I don't have a problem. Doing what I do how I do it, I have a lot of limitations. Because I don't go to all the things they invite me to. I am not going to dance for an alcoholic thing, my country is alcoholized, I am not going to be a part of that. I have some political decisions that I have carried all of my life. So I do very small things... I do... I have done very small things... very small things... in truth, I do nothing more than what I want and believe. And I work every day.

KB: That's very important, what you just finished saying; it reveals a lot. You write in a time of large mobilizations of immigration. Transnationalism is the normality of many. Yes. As well as marginality. How does your work pick up on what's marginal, from your point of view? And I know that you have talked already about what a cultural marginalization is, a marginalization of class. Yesterday, for example, you were speaking about this object, what is it called? Please.

JB: The Cantina or Marmita⁷ in Brazil.

beat.

⁷ A metal food container.

KB: To me, that Cantina reminds me of Santo Domingo. The women use it for bringing food to their husbands.

JB: For me, that's it.

KB: And yesterday when you were speaking about what you brought, from I don't know what place, from India obviously. Did that object remind you of that? Did it connect you with that working class...?

JB: Of all of the countries, that's why it's there. It's a dance. I'm going to say, in India, there is a two-minute dance that... is danced with this object. And I danced it in an international school, like a high school there. And the owner, a millionaire, was insulted because I, the actress from New York, not from the Dominican Republic, from New York! I was there with that thing of the poor people in India.

KB: This was in India? Interesting.

JB: Because it has to do with class. To me it reconfirmed that that was the element I needed.

KB: So, this object that you utilize in your performance. It's a symbol of class.

JB: Of course.

KB: And there this... [interruption]

JB: For me it has great beauty. Furthermore, my food, what nourishes me as a poet. There is an installation of this in the text *Bliss*, in *Bliss* it talks a lot about this food of love that I was talking about yesterday [referring to her performance in the conference]. So all of my work isn't very illustrative when I can say... I can be dancing I don't know, la Bachata *Bliss*, that little piece of Bachata ay ay ay is a Bachata from the fifties in the Dominican Republic. And connecting a phrase about the Bachata with a word in English like *I, I am, to the* ay ay ay ay... So then I'm... there I am weaving mine, my Bachata *Bliss*. So... I am very slow, it takes me a lot of time to do things. Because I enjoy it too much. So [laughs]. Now I am seeing videos from the seventies and eighties of the Dominican Merengue, I don't know. Looking for elements of physical work, you know? So, every morning that's what I do from four to ten... video and doing my notes... extremely tiring until I begin watching the videos, you know? So the mornings are like this, fabulous. This is for *Bliss*. So... the marginality... I don't know, a yunyunyun you know, a slushy of somekind, so it's my call, it's my call on it. And that transnationality is the essence of the world. Now they call it those names but, since when has that not happened?

KB: Of course.

JB: The Arawaks didn't go over there to Venezuela in small canoes and I don't know? But it's okay.

KB: How does Josefina Báez see or define the collective Dominican identity?

JB: If it has to do with the collective, I don't go there. That is of the collective, as I always say, no one represents me, and I don't represent anyone either. I can talk about my identity. Truthfully. It's difficult because in the same family you find everything about the Dominican Republic. So, if identity is homogenizing, it can't be defined. When I hear the great experts about the Dominicans, I say, "So ah, that's what I am? Oh yes! You don't say. Oh, ah let me take note because that is what I am." Because they're promoting a little equation that I have never seen, I haven't lived it, I don't know it, what you're telling me. I believe, I am not sure, that we are the same around the world. So, they demonize us or endorse us, exoticize us. My work is to deliver my work, do my work, do my work. Let's continue.

KB: So national for you, what does national mean?

JB: It's that... nation... with all of the complexity that can be... in all of the countries. There is the official 'national' of the government, so I am always going to say down with the government. Whoever is there, beneath the government, because yes, yes, because I am a rebel. This, the... what "La Kay" would say... the united town, a government without political parties. "La Kay" the professor. So... that job of what's national, yes, we are a nation. What everyone defines as that... it's true, there is a group, and I, yes, I say my people, I am a big time Dominican.

KB: Okay.

JB: You said it all.

KB: *Dominicanish*, is a work read internationally. It is a fusion between the Dominican way and the South Indian culture. What does that fusion mean for you? Can we call it fusion? From your point of view, how did your compatriots, the ones from here, those from there, receive this work?

JB: Look, *Dominicanish* has... well there is the text. The people that would see the presentation, there they realize more... about my relation with India. The people that would read... there is something... there are elements of India that are universal... or that many people have worked... eh... fusion is like a form of life... it's that which... when they talk to me about the word Dominican, for me it includes that, fusing. We are the kings of sancocho⁸, what do I tell you? Locrio⁹, what do I tell you? We are born being fused, eating fusion. So, what is it that you eat? What do you dance?

⁸ A traditional stew of the Dominican Republic often used as a metaphor for a melting pot.

⁹ A mixing of rice with different ingredients.

KB: And what can that fusion represent for the future of a Dominican society? For the future of a Dominican community? That fusion for you, how do you project it toward the future?

JB: I am not good as a prophet, but I am going to throw myself in there.

KB: Throw yourself, throw yourself [laughs].

JB: That future is very connected to the future of the entire world. You see? In whatever place in the Dominican Republic they make a call for you to China, in whatever batey there is someone on the Internet. So, more than fusion, it is this moment in time. It is not demanding something of you, no, it already is this. So of course, the Dominican society of today and of the future is going to go like the societies of the entire world with what is happening in the world... depending on the levels of corruption, all of the craziness and all of that, but, but... there we go... so no it isn't more or less than another [referring here to the Dominican society in relation to other societies in the world].

KB: So tell me about your anthology of performance and of the importance of what's autobiographical.

JB: The anthology is already a creative system where I was able to organize, not only what I did, but also what I was able to teach and systematize. Not putting all of what I've learned, but putting what has been effective for me. I have been doing this for a long time, but do you use all that? It's like taking this entire burden, this overdose of information and staying pristine with the information. So that's what it's all about, that is what I teach. Very basic [referring to her teaching], because it is a system of work that functions as a base so that other people can do their own thing and create their own anthology. So this is what is taught, this is a school, a school that has the structure of a retreat that is open to everyone. So there is another layer that is uniting the audience and the performer, the actor, where some dialogues about existence take place. Sometimes they are very intellectual, but these things take place by getting up at three in the morning, meditating at four, being in silence, training, Josefina putting on Julito Deschamps' music. I work a lot with Julito Deschamps [referring to his music]. I like going walking, in all of the places I go, in Helsinki, New Zealand, they know about Cuco Valoy and about those two specifically. It is already a system of work, and from that system I have directed works, where the person that wanted to work with me, we put them there as actresses. We began an investigation process about what is it that they like the most, what is it that they like the least... what is pain, what is happiness. One of those was a movie actress in Chile whose first daughter died, and so she talked to me about that and I told her: *What do you mean you are going to be doing a classic! That is what you should be talking about* [referring to the experience of that actress]. And her

saying “Oh! This Dominican, she’s so blunt...” And so an investigation was done where we took texts from universal literature, texts from the letters of her husband about the girl, a very beautiful thing, it took us, three, four years... I’m telling you I’m slow. So the piece was completed and it traveled internationally.

KB: How beautiful.

JB: Very beautiful. So there is another girl that worked with distance. That complete piece is on YouTube. It’s called, “A Kiss is a Kiss is a Kiss.” They can see it. And so... or there is another that’s called “Today I am who I am.” It is a Chilean-Mexican girl, an excellent actress. Wow! And she was investigating about her relation with her mom and dad, and her relation with her and her mom is very interesting. So now she also has her creative piece. And the one that we are working on right now, I did the playwright. It is called, “I, Claudia of the community.” And it is a girl who’s the first that I’ve worked with in Chile. She is from my same social class. And with an impressive history that I hadn’t seen... that in her house in the 1990s, the electric light was installed. So it has fascinated me so much, her life, her work.

KB: Her history, how interesting.

JB: And she is married to a musician, a composer, she has two girls. Her name is Paz, yes those are my creative grandchildren, you know? And Diego, the little boy. Yes, they take everything from me [referring to the emotions that the children cause her to feel]. And so now we are in the investigation to prepare the piece. And [returning here to her text] *Bliss* is the text with which I created the anthology of performance. That was what accompanied me. And now putting *Bliss* on stage is putting into practice the exercise that I have made for the process of creation... for creative life and for reality. And so the base is autobiographical [referring to the starting point of her creation], but after it goes in different directions, I present *Dominicanish* in a load of places. And no one realized that that has to do with Josefina Báez, and it’s nobody’s business. The people are going to see theatrical work. The people are going to read a text, where it comes from isn’t important. What it takes is that it is effective as you are presenting it. Effective like you make braids, as I call it.

KB: Yesterday in your interaction with your public, you talked about the precision of dance, your techniques of how to act, about how all of this helps you to center yourself in your work. What is precision for you, inside of your Dominican cultural world? What does precision represent for you?

JB: In Dominicaness? Joy is precise. Happiness is precise. Difference is precise. There are very precise things in my Dominicaness. It’s precise in that I go to all of these places and I do the same thing, washing my panties like it says in *Dominicanish*. For me that is Dominicaness. There is precision in family, you can be... if

you are good, it doesn't matter, but if there's something bad, there they are. This is precision for me, in my Dominican world. In my world I am too messy [referring to her disorganization]. On stage, I am very precise. And my students: "No, teacher, I'm coming to clean the apartment" and me? No. Leave my disorder like that. Let me work like that. "No no, I don't want them to say that my teacher is disorganized." Don't leave my book there, I want it over there.

KB: I understand myself in my own mess.

JB: Exactly. Sometimes when I have found an already-clipped piece of text, and I put it there [referring to her space], and these women that clean... it doesn't stop [suggesting the cleanliness is the reason she loses her things]. And so on stage, they always ask me about this, precision. And I tell them no, not everything in my life is precise. It isn't precise... no, my life isn't like that. My life is complementary enough. I am completely dyslexic. But on stage yes, I know all of the cardinal points because there is... that's my expertise. I'm trained.

KB: Interesting. I... have had conversations and discussions with other intellectuals, friends, Dominican artists. And there is a tendency to look at or find precision in the exterior of our own home. And I ask myself, is it time that we as Dominicans begin to specify what is ours.

JB: I believe that it is precise. Perhaps the word isn't what is used, but we continue being a community. It's like now, our young people who have left to go to Harvard, and I don't know how many return to tell the community what they have to do and how to do it. So one sees it and says yes, yes, yes, the same as what one did with their parents. They have all of this theory, please, stop already, you know. So precision as a Dominican, we are talking from those terms but it is being lived. It's possible that... I don't know, but I'm living it. What do you want from me? This is it. Like the theorists, this, I don't know, this is like... the repetitive issue about Dominicans... we have problems with the black identity. It's repetitive, and before it bothered me a lot... now I don't pay much attention to it and they say [referring to the theorists about black identity in the United States] that one has to know what black is from their definitions, but we are living this black identity. Living. You don't... [referring to those that can talk from a black identity, but not necessarily from others] that's why perhaps... that if the light or dark Indian, those euphemisms, and all of that... yes. And? [referring to the classifications Dominicans use to define themselves and for which they are criticized]. But how do you dance, how you do move your body, how do you work in silence? There's something else about Africa... that hasn't become a part of the discourse... of the dialogue about black identity, and that is the most important thing about Africa, the philosophy of life. The philosophy of life, beyond... And so I remember an... African teacher that... that told me, "No, no, no, no, no. The fact is that you are so convoluted,

you are truly Africa. You are Africa.” And if I said, *I am not going wear that*, [referring to ideas that she was not going to adopt] they all told me what I was not going to do. No, no, what I am is Dominican, don’t screw with me, and they truly told me, “What you are is Africa, Africa, you are Africa because look how convoluted you are.” And Africans told me in conversation, “Continue, continue like that.”

KB: And continue telling me about this complexity. A student asked you if there is or isn’t a conflict in what is black in the Dominican Republic, and you obviously don’t share that. You say that it is a choice...

JB: It’s a choice. Like it is for everyone. You know, because I see that it is the same people that are telling me that I have an identity crisis, because my people are straightening their hair, those same people already have their hair straightened. When a person from Honduras does it, that person, as La Kay says, is “reinventing herself.” When a Dominican does it, she has no clue that she is black. So that double standard, I stick it where the sun don’t shine... [laughs]. So that type of thing... is going to always be something related to how you [referring to people in general] want to see me, that’s why I cannot fight you, because I don’t have time for that. Are some people always going to see me from there? Yes. Alright. But I am also going to tell you what I think from here.

KB: And from the social point of view that has to do with laws, all that constitutes a social system for educative benefit, the development of a community in which the black Dominicans in the Dominican Republic are marginalized...

JB: And where aren’t they, where aren’t they?

KB: And so we come to our problem. How do we resolve that? Is it resolved in part by the identification of that, yes, there is a black community, or is it resolved in trying to see ourselves, all of us as we are, a mixture?

JB: For me that doesn’t come from a collective. There is a group that is the only group to which I pertain, we call ourselves *we*, we don’t call ourselves Afro-Dominicans, Dominicans or I don’t know what... Afro descent, we call ourselves *We-period-the Other*. And there are people from every class, all kinds of black, everything. We are trying to investigate and do things. I’m interested in the health of the human being, health, mental health, physical health – that interests me. You want to be or not be black, you want this or that, I could care less... What is important is that you, from your conscience, possibly very different from mine, you are healthy, that you don’t damage someone else, that you don’t damage me. If a damn black wants to say that she is blonde, there’s her problem. You can’t tell me how I should live my Dominicanness or my blackness either. Nobody can, you can but I won’t give a fuck. I think that from the academia, it has been said to the black North Ameri-

cans that they are called African-Americans. In Harlem I haven't heard anyone call himself an African-American, anyone! I don't know anyone... none of my friends call themselves that... that aren't in academia. Everyone is black.

KB: Interesting, call it what it is.

JB: Yes, this is a large construction... and there are documentaries, and all of these things... and one is left thinking, "Oh really now, the in-thing is Afro-Latina, Afro-Dominican, Afro-whatever, great." If it works for you, it works, but you know that it is a way people earn a living, let's be clear. You are looking for what's yours, you are taking out your money from there, so don't come to me trying to pass off your money-making theory, your work, what pays you... as my crisis – "I have a crisis? Really? You don't say!" There is another reality and I am always going to say, ok, I as a marginal self, what interests me is that we have a conscience and that consciously you know who wants to screw with you, who is screwing with you, who is believing that they can define what's yours – what's bad or good is your definition. I am not deciding for anyone. I am not telling anyone from any country anything, So don't come to screw with mine [referring to her own definition of herself]. So, there is a beautiful dialogue that takes place, so as you know, that's why they don't invite me to many places anymore [laughs]. Furthermore, with my face, with my color, I should be dancing Gaga. "And I should be doing that? Ah, you don't say, ah yes, and what if I don't know that myself? Do you know what I should do on my journey?" Fuck, you have some drums [referring to nerve] that not even Tito Puente has. So to me it seems like a great arrogance. It is a choice. I want them to go to Africa [referring to those that criticize her], to go to Africa so they see how the women straighten their hair and put all kinds of things on them... Maybe then they will no longer say things to Dominican women. They should go! And they will see how so many put on lots of cream to make themselves whiter! They should go! Go to the source!! Don't talk to me... They are talking a lot, but there they... That is the way they earn a living, that is their work, and you are working, it is your job and you want to mess with my life, those are two very big things. So there is a big difference, that's why I cannot be a politician, the best thing life did was put me on a spiritual and creative journey, because the street would have been extremely dangerous, I would have been a menace... My path is one of passion.

KB: Let's finish with that, with passion?

JB: Yes, passion... the greatest devotion, the devotion to do things. I return to the same thing, to the same thing, to understand or, more than understanding, to play with that, to see, to see. I liked it a lot, what you said about consolidating that space that is not a space.

KB: *Doing* fascinated me as a part of the construction of life, it's simply doing, without any categorizations, thank you a lot Josefina.

JB: Thank you, thank you. Very moved.

KB: This has been a journey for me. Thank you.

Melissa Ramos

Traverse



Fig 1: Melissa Ramos, screen still from *Traverse*, 2012. Courtesy of the artist. Click on the image to watch the video.

November 2012

Hello my dear friend,

*I just watched your film *Traverse* on your website and I feel compelled in writing to you about it, or maybe just writing about it. I had seen some of the images you sent me in a small booklet, and I already liked them very much; still, it was a strange and emotional experience for me to watch the extract of your film.*

In your film I saw me and my memories; I saw my childhood and all that is lost; in this lady walking peacefully, I saw my grandparents, my great-grand-parents, the emotional stability of my childhood. I saw myself looking at my sea, the Mediterranean, feeling the loss and the peacefulness that come long after the loss, at certain moments. I saw the waves of the sea, the waves of life, the coming and going of my emotions, the violence of some of them. And then I saw my sister who departed so long ago, but she feels so near, climbing the rocks as a ruthless, beautiful spontaneous child. She had become a sad and lost adult, maybe because she couldn't face the loss, but I prefer to remember her as the extraordinary child she was, climbing rocks, climbing trees, not fearing anything. She let the fear and the loss overwhelm her; she maybe thought that she had to kill the child in order not to feel fear and loss.

I chose to embrace fear and loss as they are part of my emotions, and only my emotions, whatever they are, make me who I am, and free. I hope that I will keep walking but that I will keep stopping sometimes and looking at the sea of my emotions, however painful it can be.

It is so strange that your film and your emotions feel so close to mine. I could find pieces of my life in your film, and what pieces they are! I barely talk about my sister these days, and never in the way I just did. I miss her terribly, so I thank you because it feels good to talk about her, it feels good to remember her and the love that still is.

I am glad I've met you and I believe that we have met well, my friend. I do not believe in fate, but I believe that some "accidents" in our lives must be embraced.

*With love,
Eve*

Dearest Eve,

I thought of you yesterday when I heard Palestine was announced the 149th state, hopeful for change and peace. It will still take some time for the war to ease there, but these are the first steps.

Your missive came to me with such tenderness I'm honoured to have created a felt experience. I send my condolences to your sister.

This was the film I wanted you to voiceover. I was meaning to invite you to fill in the gaps between the words with your own poetry of words. It can be anything you feel about notions of 'absence & presence'. There is no rush, but whenever you feel the courage to do it.

There is something strange about this work, really. It was made during a sad time of my life, which was also a time for big transformation. It is my history as a child used as an allegory: I fell off a cliff, falling in flood waters during a hurricane, close at darkness.

Something I was thinking of, was the eternal gaze of the horizon, the reverie of water, the uncontrollable heavy waters, maternal water & feminine water, purity and morality, violent waters and the voice of waters.

*With love,
Melissa*

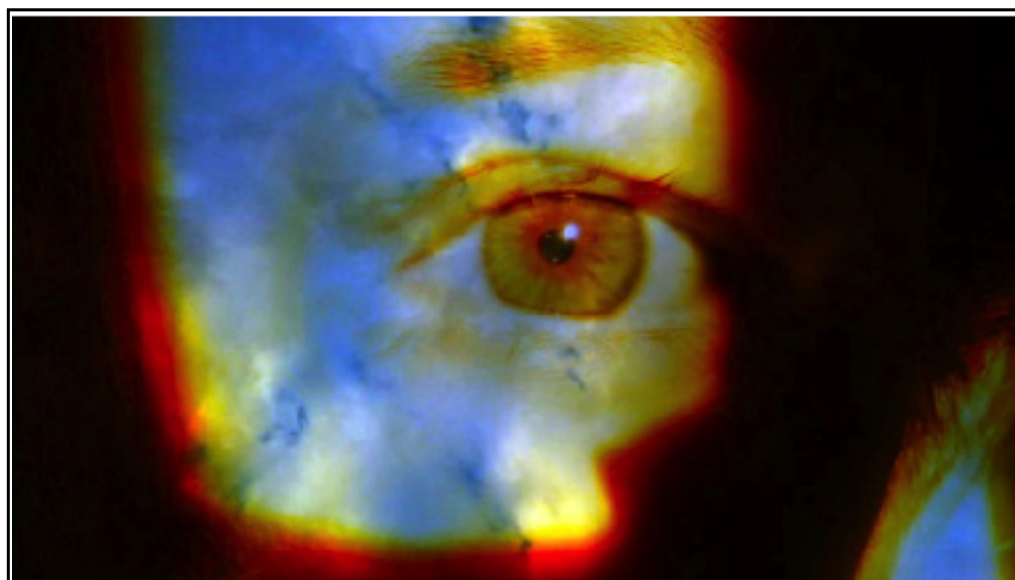


Fig. 1: Lynn Book, "Cloud Eye", still from *Escapes* (2012). Courtesy of the artist. Click on the image to watch the video.

Escapes is a video work conceived as a book of eight poems – in this case, poems that deliver meaning through the sound of the voice, as much as the text on the screen/page along with the interplay of restless images propelled by micro music-scapes. The audio is drawn from two live performances of *Escapes* (2012), a collaborative concert project with Chicago sound and media artist, Shawn Decker.

The content of *Escapes* centers on the Phaedra figure who is transmuted from an ancient myth-story into a contemporary sign of escape. Here, she becomes less a character and more a divining tool used to locate voluptuous frictions between release and containment, stasis and freedom. The story of Phaedra itself is one of exile. 'She' has migrated through Baroque and contemporary operas, from Racine's stage by way of Seneca and others, including conflicting fragments that Euripides wrote, lost, then wrote again in ancient Greece. Phaedra becomes the ideal escape body for our time, resonant with multiple histories and radiant with propositions for possible futures.

Escapes is Volume 1 of a larger video project comprised of 3 volumes entitled: *UnReading for Future Bodies*. In Volume 2, *Derangements* will bring focus to the Chimera figure with its fluid, frightening and ultimately freeing boundaries (in development and with support from of a Visiting Artist Residency at Sarah Lawrence College). *Fragmenta* is the title of the third volume which will weave together multiple voices of actual women and girls from across time and culture whose desire for knowledge transcends the risks in obtaining it. The moving text/sound/image arrangements of each book of poetry are important to the un-reading thrust, engaging viewers in a

performative experience with various animated and interactive treatments that both highlight the construction of symbolic meaning and also explode conventional order by introducing new modes of organizing understanding and inspiring possibility.

Escapes officially launches with the online interdisciplinary journal *Anglistica AION* (University of Naples 'L'Orientale', Italy) in this issue on "Writing Exile: Women, the Arts and Technologies" edited by Wanda Balzano and Silvana Carotenuto. Currently the 23 min. video may be accessed [here](#). Each poem can also be watched in whatever order the viewer chooses by clicking on the *Escapes - Table of Contents* link at the bottom of the video, and then on the thumbnails across the top of the Vimeo page. The eight videos range from about 1:30 to 5:20 in length.

This project has received funding from the Research and Publication Fund and also the Humanities Institute at Wake Forest University, and has been supported through a Visiting Artist Residency at Sarah Lawrence College.

Introduction to Lynn Book's Video Project *Escapes**

* The following text, with minor revision, has been delivered by the author at the projection of *Escapes* held at Wake Forest University on March 26, 2013. Hosted by IPLACe (Interdisciplinary Performance and the Liberal Arts Center).

It is an absolute privilege for me to introduce Lynn Book's video-work, *Escapes*. Last year I asked Lynn if she would like to contribute to an international online journal called *Anglistica AION* and issued by the University of Naples, as I was going to be its co-editor with my Italian colleague Silvana Carotenuto. The special issue focuses on *Writing Exile: Women, The Arts and Technologies*. Lynn, of course, was the perfect choice for a contributor. At the time, she was already working on this piece, and she immediately accepted to be on board our project.

In our special issue of *Anglistica AION*, which is a collection of transnational contributions from East to West, from North to South, we set out to explore on a larger scale and over different historical periods the following questions: what is the link between the condition of the exiled and creativity? More specifically, in what way do women use writing, the arts and technology to express the displacement of identities, geographies and cultures?

Lynn Book's *Escapes* answers these questions and exceeds them. For this reason, in our online journal we have placed her video-work at the end, as a way to summarize the central questions of our collection and also to re-circulate them in a gesture that, emblematically embodied by Phaedra, re-turns with a passion. Phaedra is presented, in the video that we are going to see, as a figure of migration and resistance, of creativity and desire.

Daughter of Minos and Pasiphae and wife of Theseus, Phaedra is known to fall passionately in love with her stepson Hippolytus, who rejected her. From Euripides to Sophocles, from Seneca to Ovid, from Racine to D'Annunzio, from Marina Tsvetaeva to Frank McGuinness, in poetry, play, or novel and across different time periods, there are many variations of her story. In some versions, she kills herself and falsely accuses Hippolytus to have raped her. In other versions, when she reveals her love to Hippolytus, he tries to kill her with his sword. As a result of this unrequited and incestuous love, Theseus curses his son, who dies a violent death, and Phaedra has therefore generally been seen as a woman to be blamed.

Lynn Book lifts the patriarchal veil that has covered Phaedra's body for so long and gives it a new life, a new breath. Though Phaedra has been represented through the ages as a dark figure, in Lynn Book's work we are reminded of the original meaning of Phaedra's name, which derives from the Greek word φαειρός (phaidrós), which signifies 'bright'.

I grew up in Pompeii, and I remember the classical visual representations of Phaedra as the liar, the selfish lover, the immoderate and deviant, deranged and portrayed on her deathbed, or as a tormented figure of remorse – a trend that has continued in the work of many visual artists from past to present.

In Lynn Book's multi-faceted work on Phaedra, instead, we have a breath of fresh air, actually, 8 breaths of fresh air, such as the 8 poems or escapes. Why 8? Is it by chance that, in numerology, 8 is the number of *building* or *construction* and in some theories, also the number of *destruction*? Here it seems fitting as there is both a deconstruction and a re-construction at work.

If we read the video as a book, the book of Phaedra's escapes, then, this book is framed by "Phaedra" at the beginning and "Escapes" at the end. The first page deconstructs and dissects the words that constitute Phaedra's very name, even with humor (see, for instance, the new possible words followed by explanations: "drepaah" if she were Indian; "Rap head" if she was urban youth). At the end, the word "escapes" is dissected and analyzed in its manifold synonyms, related adjectives, and usages to create alphabets of alternative bodies and alternative stories that are left open to future possibilities.

It is in this context of dismemberment and re-creation that I see *Escapes*. For instance, the virgin/whore dichotomy is deconstructed in favor of a new female sexual determination and agency. To me, one of the relevant traces of this video, among many, is the feminist struggle to redefine sexuality and desire from the varied perspectives of women's experiences. In many religious traditions and mythologies, women's sexual capacity is considered so powerful that it could distract men and undermine social order. Of course to me this resonates very much with the goal of enacting Phaedra's 'escapes' today. I like the use of the plural in the title because the use of plural recalls Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray's pre-Oedipal and pre-fallic stage of psychosexual development of *jouissance* and multiple female desire that explore the immense bodily territories which, in Phaedra's case as in other women's, have been kept under seal.

On the screen, thanks also to the suggestive vision and careful video editing of Brenton Richardson, we see traces of Phaedra's exile and escape, of her confinement and her rebellion, through her body – her body as language that is dissected and exploded. Her body – the body of language (her written and oral language) is fragmented, and uneven, refusing to be objectified as a linear whole, as the 'Phaedra package' handed down to us. As it loses linearity on the screen, Phaedra's body acquires the sound of an interrupted voice that stammers, that is divided, repeated, contracted and expanded. Language, vision, and sound converge to reveal and connect the visual fragments with fragments of memories. Language plays a prominent role here, in what we hear and what we see. At one point the disintegration and dissection are so extreme that Phaedra becomes a series of numbers or a formula, breaking into a whisper. To me if, on the one hand, this disintegration expresses resistance to patriarchal classification, on the other hand it also speaks of the threat of dissolution of language and identity for Phaedra in those patriarchal texts that condemn her for expressing her sexual desire. After all, the threat of dissolution of language is also a real concern of migrants who survive in diasporic identities. Identity and language are intimately connected. Lynn Book, with the assistance of Shawn Decker (Chicago sound and media artist) and Bren-

ton Richardson (video editor), through words and images and sounds has been able to thread the fine line between these forms of dissolution.

Ultimately, *Escapes* tells us of an excessive passion, or “a passion with too many ss”, that has been sounded by voice and wind instruments and told as part of a “twisted story” – “twisted” not in the sense of “perverse” but in the sense of re-interpreted. The excessive “s”, the twisted letter par excellence, becomes a symbol of rebellion that is centrally experienced throughout the video, for instance, as *sense, sex, space, speech, sound, fish, suck, spin, force, fish, voice, humans, survive*. The ‘s’ is also a symbol of silence, as Phaedra, in Lynn Book’s video, survives, *escapes*, breaks the silence, speaks through the silences.

Phaedra escapes from her classical portrayal as deviant and becomes wild in the sense dictated by nature, as free and fluid as the forest or the ocean, ready to be new and return, as a ghost or revenant that does not stay put, that does not politely wait in its assigned place. Beyond the pleasure principle, in the *fort/da* game exemplified by walking feet in the video, Phaedra’s body moves and moves us, in the creative urge to find self-expression, to return and survive in the pages and skin of a video *book* – as well as in the mind and body of Lynn Book.

Myth as Emotional Technology: A Review Essay

Nóra Séllei and June Waudby, eds., *She's Leaving Home: Women's Writing in English in a European Context* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011)

Jennifer Ingleheart, ed., *Two Thousand Years of Solitude: Exile after Ovid* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011)

Fiona Cox, *Sibylline Sisters: Virgil's Presence in Contemporary Women's Writing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011)

Eavan Boland, *A Journey With Two Maps: Becoming a Woman Poet* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011)

Gesa Zinn and Maureen Tobin Stanley, eds., *Exile through a Gendered Lens: Women's Displacement in Recent European History, Literature and Cinema* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012)

The Irish poet Eavan Boland has been quoted as having said, “I have a great interest in myth because myth is an emotional technology whereby people can handle mysteries.”¹ Such a statement opens the floodgates of technology to include those most elusive of Eleusinian elements, the mysteries of ancient searches, journeys of ascent and descent, and accompanying exilic emotions. Boland goes on record as perceiving myth to be a literal, and literary, tool to aid in the understanding of mysteries. Myth becomes a technology of the *tantric*, if you will, a way of understanding stories of the soul and spirit while being derivative of tactile praxis: *tantric* is Sanskrit for ‘loom’ or ‘warp’ from the root base *tan* meaning “expand, extend, stretch”.

Woven here will be threads from the titles above. The thread that the first three anthologies here share is an essay in each about aspects of the work of Eavan Boland; the fourth text is by and about Boland herself. The fifth book takes us closer to technology. In the meantime, through the Boland threads I will try to tie this review of recent women's exilic writing together. This is writing that has myth – as an emotional technology – at its core.

She's Leaving Home: Women's Writing in English in a European Context begins with the long tradition of poetical and philosophical travelling tales dating back to the 16th century and moves to incorporate concepts of globalization and transnationalism such as trafficking, nomading, and information/idea passage at far faster speeds to far further places than previously possible. Nóra Séllei in her “Introduction” traces the race-class-gender triad to new economic, social and cultural configurations in-

¹ Michael O'Siadhail, “An Interview with Eavan Boland”, *Poetry Review*, 27, 20 (*Poetry Ireland*), <http://poetryireland.ie/publications/pir-archive/index.php?area=item&id=4290>, 15 June 2013.

formed by evolving hybrids and technologies. In her conclusion, inter-categorical constellations composed of structures oft-times intermediated by hegemony, violence and exchange are seen to challenge contemporary European social theory. Editors Séllei and June Waudby divide their book into four parts: “Travel(ling): Narratives of Race, Class and Gender”, “Travelling, Genres and Narrative History”, “Gender and Nation: Travelling Identity”, and “Narratives of Travel: Mythical and Historical (Self-)Representations”. The texts are almost entirely written by women contributors – of seventeen, two are male.

Following Séllei’s sweeping introduction, the editors allow each essayist to intimately commence their respective pieces by contextualizing responses to ‘leaving home’. The essays eventually itemize several types of women who have ‘left home’. The first work, by Irén E. Annus and entitled “The Unheroine: The Figure of the Spinster in Doris Lessing’s ‘The Trinket Box’”, speaks of mid-19th century population of unmarried English women relocated by the British government to various British colonies with the hope that they’d set up simulations of authentic English domestic spaces abroad, serving their country while being served by their country through emigrant support. The next piece, Séllei’s own, “Travelling Agency: Female Subjectivity in Narratives of Home-Leaving and in *Foreign Parts*”, begins by conjuring in its opening pages Nora famously slamming the door when she left home, marriage and children as the stellar New Woman in Henrik Ibsen’s 1879 *A Doll’s House*, while the remainder of the essay discusses Scottish writer Janice Galloway’s 1994 home-leaving novel.

Later, psychogeography and cartographies of the body are explored as home-leaving methodologies in one of the two pieces about work by Jeanette Winterson. It is important to note the inclusion of Julia Salmerón’s “‘Yes, I’m going to Europe to make a mint’: The Painful Journey of Saartjie Baartman and Suzan-Lori Parks’s *Venus*” and Gabrielle Griffin’s “Figuring Home: Identity and Belonging in the world of Black and Asian Playwrights in Britain” as these are two essays among those discussed here from the first four books that directly address the ‘race’ prong of the aforementioned triad. Ann Haog, in “Remapping Home: Gender and Nation in Rebecca West’s *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*”, cites not Virginia Woolf’s insular oft-alluded place of escape, a room of one’s own, but Woolf’s expansive global outlook as expressed in *Three Guineas*, “[i]n fact, as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world.”² By contrast, Eilish Rooney’s “Leaving Home and Staying Put: Intersectional Narrative from Northern Ireland’s ‘Transition’” deals with the ways in which war yields dislocation, gender and socio-economic inequities, and conflict-caused transitions often accompanied – as civil strife in Northern Ireland has been – with an evolving body of what could be coined ‘conflict lit’.

Included in the *oeuvre* of Northern Ireland conflict literature would be the work of writer Eavan Boland whose ethics are considered in Séllei/Waudby’s volume by Andrea P. Balough in an essay titled, “‘Home Sweet Home’: Eavan Boland and the Trope of Exile at the Intersection of Nation, Class and Gender”. Balough

² Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Inc., 1966), 109.

considers ethical issues at play in the work of Eavan Boland – questioning the very foundations of Boland’s strong exilic stance. The Greek *ethos* is at the root of *ethikos* (meaning ‘moral character’); in late Latin it became *ethicus* whose feminine, *ethica*, in its turn became the modern English *ethics*. This etymology for ‘morality’ leads us easily to Ovid and Virgil, for whom *ethikos* and *ethicus/ethica*, respectively, were crucial concerns. Interestingly, it is not Boland’s ethics that are examined in the other anthologies considered – the essays that concern Eavan Boland in these collections are “Children of the Island: Ovid, Poesis, and Loss in the Poetry of Eavan Boland and Derek Mahon” by Jennifer J. Dellner in *Two Thousand Years of Solitude: Exile after Ovid* and an eponymous chapter in *Sibylline Sisters: Virgil’s Presence in Contemporary Women’s Writing*. Both these other works accept, without examination, the premises of Boland’s claim to exile at a young age – a claim that affects Boland’s entire body of work.

The other *Sibylline Sisters* in Fiona Cox’s volume are Ruth Fainlight, Michèle Roberts, Margaret Drabble, A.S. Byatt, Christa Wolf, Monique Wittig, Joyce Carol Oates, Janet Lembke, and Ursula Le Guin, presented in that order with Eavan Boland slotted in as second. These ‘sisters’ are all born between 1929 and 1949; they are all white women writers from the United States or England/France/Germany: a rather homogenous set, one could say. It is quite what one might expect, I suppose, if one set out seeking Virgil’s presence in contemporary women’s writing. But are there really no young literary artists in Moscow or Naples or Rio thinking and writing about Dido or Lavinia or otherwise contributing to what Cox calls “this new *aetes Vergiliana*”?

Cox’s female force, born pretty much into places of privilege (e.g., with educational opportunities available to them) between the beginning of the Great Depression and not long after the end of the Second Great War, were among the last to learn Latin as part of their formal education. As such they’ve become Sibyls, Virgilian guides into their own underworlds. As Cox confides, “[t]here is, of course, a paradox inherent in the fact that Virgil is both hailed as the Father of a literary tradition that has been so set upon silencing and excluding the voices of women and invoked in order to help women articulate their consequent sense of exclusion and exile.”³ Biographic and bibliographic essays on each author’s exiles and exclusions become the body of the book.

Fainlight self-identifies as “Jew. Woman. Poet.” in her poem “Vertical”; her Sibyl series includes poems entitled “The Shinto Sibyl”, “The Persian Sibyl”, and “The Hebrew Sibyl”. Half-English, half-French, Roberts channels Hades through Proust; some poems rework the Demeter/Persephone myth, but it is in *The Book of Mrs. Noah* that Roberts classifies a distinct underworld with the words, “[t]he Dewey system, used in all the public libraries in Britain, places Women in a sub-section of Sociology along with Lunatics and Gypsies (Wanderers).”⁴ Drabble’s twenty-first-century Sibyls owe much to Eliot’s “Waste Land”, while Byatt’s underworlds are entered through the anguishes of adultery, agoraphobia and Alzheimer’s. Wolf’s *Kassandra* is considered very Virgilian though only indirectly so; whereas Wittig’s

³ Fiona Cox, *Sibylline Sisters: Virgil’s Presence in Contemporary Women’s Writing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 13.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 107.

work draws directly from Dante in her third novel, the 1985 *Virgile, Non* in which a character called “Wittig” journeys towards a Cocteau-inspired underworld. Oates responds to 9/11 in her 2004 *The Tattooed Girl*, a work in which Virgil is evoked directly by contemporary characters. Concerns shared by 21st century environmentalists and sustainability activists are linked by Lembke to Virgil’s treatise on farming in the *Georgics* which she translated for a contemporary readership; and Le Guin’s latest, *Lavinia* (2008), is bound by its title character to the *Aeneid*. But it is Boland who

[uses] Virgil to help her chart ... histories of enforced exile and homesickness We have seen repeatedly Boland’s difficulties in stabilizing her sense of home within her own country and that the sense of exile that marked her childhood has never really left her. Indeed, her vocation as poet has intensified this sense of living on the margins, since her experiences as a woman left her on the outside of mainstream poetic tradition in Ireland. Her isolation as a woman poet made her more sensitive to the displacements and exiles within her country, so that ultimately it is on the edges of tradition that she finds her home and her voice: “The more I thought of her, the more it seemed to me that a sense of place can happen at the very borders of myth and history.”⁵

⁵ Ibid., 87-88.

Ovidian exile is the concern of Ingleheart’s anthology, *Two Thousand Years of Solitude: Exile after Ovid*. In the 8th century, at the height of his popularity as a Rome’s greatest living poet, Ovid was banished to the edge of remote Romania for reasons that remain mysterious to this day. Ovid famously attributed the exile to “*carmen et error*” – a poem and a mistake – but what that cryptic conclusion refers to still mesmerizes scholars. Ovid chronicles this time – his remaining years – in what is considered to be the earliest recorded exile literature.

Ingleheart outlines the problematics of the term ‘exile’; how its primary *OED* definition stresses the legal and involuntary removal from one’s homeland or state-enforced banishment, but also includes more modern English usages from the experiences of refugees or other displaced peoples to deeper issues of alienation (cultural or political oppression) which may not involve actual displacement from a homeland.

Although about one third of the contributors to this collection of seventeen essays are written by women including Cox and Ingleheart, “the essays in this volume consider the fashioning of exilic, predominantly masculine, subjectivities The exceptions are Jennifer Dellner’s discussion of Eavan Boland’s poetry and Barbara Witucki’s [essay].”⁶

Dellner’s essay is entitled “Children of the Island: Ovid, *Poesis*, and Loss in the Poetry of Eavan Boland and Derek Mahon”. According to Dellner’s first paragraphs, it is Boland who has qualms with Mahon’s stand on the exilic: “She seems to regard him as an interloper, taking up displacement by choice rather than having had the experience of it brought on by the forces outside of his control, in contrast with her own involuntary geographical separation in childhood.”⁷ Ironically, we will see, Boland may be an interloper of the very sort she imagines Mahon to be. As in Cox’s volume, there follows what Dellner

⁶ Jennifer Ingleheart, ed., *Two Thousand Years of Solitude: Exile after Ovid* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 103.

⁷ Ibid., 223.

calls “A Poetics of Rescue”, an analysis of Boland’s 1994 poem, “The Pomegranate”, with Persephone signifying her Irish child persona and Ovid as her exiled self. Both Dellner and Cox trace the Ceres/Persephone myth through Boland’s *oeuvre* easily. Dellner notes, “[i]ronically, it was a linguistic exile of a reverse kind that Boland claims did much to teach her the power of language and poetry: her time as a child in England excluded her from learning Irish and propelled her instead to Latin and to the Underworld: not Ovid’s yet, but Virgil’s.”⁸ Always in these reviews we are returned to Boland’s departures, to the idea that her childhood spent away from Ireland is the source of her empathy with other exiles.

⁸ Fiona Cox, *Sibylline Sisters: Virgil’s Presence in Contemporary Women’s Writing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 227.

This brings us to Boland’s own most recent book, *A Journey With Two Maps: Becoming a Woman Poet* (2011). Boland’s “Journey” begins with,

[i]t would be simpler for every poet if the ethics and aesthetics surrounding them were fixed and signposted. But they’re not. Sometimes whatever clarity there is emerges only gradually out of human impulses, human flaws; in this case my own.⁹

⁹ Eavan Boland, *A Journey with Two Maps: Becoming a Woman Poet*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011), 3.

Boland could be referring to what was revealed about her ethics in Séllei/Waudby’s volume’s essay by Andrea P. Balough titled, “‘Home Sweet Home’: Eavan Boland and the Trope of Exile at the Intersection of Nation, Class and Gender”. Balough takes a direct stab at Boland:

This paper argues that Boland’s formation of her poetic identity in terms of exile is rooted in the rhetoric and aesthetics of exile rather than emerging from her experience as a poet-exile in the strict political sense. In other words, in Boland’s autobiographical narrative exile appears as a powerful trope which covers up the political and social privileges Boland has enjoyed as a migratory subject in relation to the exiles, refugees, and economic emigrants with whom Boland equates her experience of living away from the homeland.¹⁰

¹⁰ Nóra Séllei and June Waudby, eds., *She’s Leaving Home: Women’s Writing in English in a European Context* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011), 174.

Balough rightly continues,

[f]urthermore, Boland’s narrative of her childhood experiences in England offers a specific European case in which a European national identity becomes intelligible exclusively in relation to England thus eliminating the European context as a constitutive element of Irish identity Problematically, this postcolonial construction covers up contemporary Ireland’s privileged position as a member of the West and the First World. As this chapter argues, Boland’s elimination of the European geo-political specificity of Ireland from her narrative of leaving the Irish home(land) produces a tragic history of postcolonial immigration in place of the experience of the privileged child of an internationally mobile Irish diplomat.¹¹

¹¹ Ibid., 174-5.

Apparently Eavan Boland, in 1950, at five years of age, left Ireland with her family to live in London; several years later they left for New York for three years. She returned with her family to Dublin at age fourteen, nearly a decade later. But there was no fleeing and they were not forced: her father, Frederick, was Ireland’s Secretary of the Department of External Affairs:

In 1949, he led the negotiations which changed Ireland's status from membership of the Commonwealth to that of a republic. In 1950 he was appointed the first Irish Ambassador to Britain, and he held this post for six years. In 1956 the Boland family moved to New York because he became the Irish Ambassador to the United Nations In brief, Boland's father belonged to the Irish political elite and Boland 'had to' move to England as a child because [her] father had the distinction of being the very first ambassador of the Republic of Ireland to Britain [But] Boland narrates her move to Britain as an exile, a consequence of banishment, a question of no choice. Thus, in her representation, arguably, exile remains all through an effective rhetorical figure promoting her Irish authorship in terms of suffering, thereby covering up her actual living conditions away from Ireland as the daughter of the representative of the Irish state in Britain. In Boland's life the issue of not having a choice arises simply as a result of her age when the Boland family moves to Britain. Indeed, the condition of not having a choice as a child does not equal the lack of choice of a political exile or the limited choice of the economic emigrants and refugees. In fact, the Boland family could have moved back to Ireland whenever they wanted to. They not only had the political freedom to commute between Ireland and Britain – as Boland's father did – but also the economic means to come and go as they wished.¹²

¹² Ibid., 181.

Balough cites Boland's autobiographical 1994 essay, "A Kind of Scar: The Woman Poet in a National Tradition", and 1996 biography, "Object Lesson: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time", as sites of the writer's ethical missteps. By *A Journey With Two Maps: Becoming a Woman Poet* (2011), Boland has exchanged terms: "My childhood was nomadic."¹³ She begins to locate herself among the white women anthologized above, a "Sibylline sister" of privilege born between the Depression and the end of WWII:

And so up in my room, opening the heavy burgundy covers of the encyclopedia, bending over and peering at those girls – immune as I believed them to be from my small humiliations and exclusions – I was the last figment of an old world. The hidden and unadmitted sexuality of my own culture would disappear, or so it seemed, almost overnight. In me it lay somewhere between the mind and the body, a lost soul at that point waiting for a definition. That definition would come, swiftly and fiercely. Centuries would extinguish themselves and give out and give up their interpretations of girlhood somewhere between my last boyfriend and my first child. Everywhere the old-fashioned superstitions would vanish. An entire civilization of crinolines and wasp-waists, of false conversations and choked-back desires, of late-night dreams and short-step dances, of rouge and flattery and simpers and flirtations, was about to disappear. And with it an empire of rude awakenings. But there in my room, at the gates of puberty, I knew nothing about this. My childhood was ending. I came back to Dublin from New York at fourteen years of age, landed there like some mythical traveler on a magic island without maps or signals. I spent a week at boarding school. On weekends I went in with friends to O'Connell Street and ate in strange-seeming cafes where the food had Italian names but the sausages were plainly Irish.¹⁴

¹³ Eavan Boland, *A Journey with Two Maps: Becoming a Woman Poet*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011), 27.

¹⁴ Ibid., 30.

Boland has repositioned herself in this most recent work: no longer an exile, now "some mythical traveler" confessing her ability to traverse divergent worlds – between boarding school and city, between countries and cuisines.

Boland's book is divided into three parts, "Journeys", "Maps" and "Destinations". "Maps" consists of a series of essays about women poets whom Boland

admires, presented in this order: Adrienne Rich, Elizabeth Bishop, Charlotte Mew, Sylvia Plath, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Denise Levertov, Anne Bradstreet, Gwendolyn Brooks, Paula Meehan and a lost Latin poet presumed to be a woman. The book closes with “Destinations”, a “Letter to a Young Woman Poet”. Interestingly, in many of her poet portraits, Boland directly deals with issues of ethics, ethos and even exile – areas she shies away from or approaches only indirectly in the rest of the book’s texts; the portraits tend to be reprints of previously published articles.

Frankly, Boland’s narrative is so full of poetic flourish that it is hard to follow the substance of what she is saying sometimes – much of the writing seems, to this reader, to be embellished ephemera. To be fair, referring back, I cannot locate an example of this, and yet it is the impression I am left with as I finish reading her “Letter to a Young Woman Poet”. Boland seems to stretch a story so it may approach a modern myth. This might be a natural impulse for one who believes that “myth is an emotional technology whereby people can handle mysteries”. She did well by her personal myth, casting herself as an ‘exile’ worthy of political and cultural empathy: that myth lived over fifty years; she was caught in her lie the same year two more major collections of essays – the works cited here – came out corroborating her exilic stretch. Boland’s myth was an effective emotional technology, as for five decades it helped readers handle the mysteries of exile she was attempting to excavate through her writing. But truth has betrayed her, and instead of facing the emotional technology head on, she’s chosen to dance around it in *A Journey with Two Maps: Becoming a Woman Poet*.

None of the books above address contemporary technology even as a research tool, yet all undoubtedly have benefited from the power of the Internet and the wealth of the World Wide Web in their production and distribution. Even, if not especially, scholars studying Latin and Greek sources can compare multiple online translations and Classical resources. Boland alludes to texting in one instance, otherwise social networking is not mentioned anywhere in these works. Yet, an elusive ‘emotional technology’ does seem to be at work here, helping to make sense of certain myths/mysteries. Talking about this type of ‘technology’ might not have made sense outside the contemporary context of laptops, tablets and smart phones – yet Boland’s emotional technology is entirely unrelated to such devices. Or is it? Is the absence of contemporary technology in four major texts about women writing and exile published in 2011 an example of an ignored elephant in the room? Or is it an abject absence? While I was reading these texts in hardcover and writing this text on my laptop, I referred to my iPad to clarify or confirm concepts and check definitions or dates. Should this writing have been subtitled, “The Emotional Myth of Technology”? No. Here I’ve been tracing Eavan Boland’s private myth while outlining the contents of recent texts that include public discussions of her work. These recent texts are significant to this issue in that they deal with the histories and definitions of exile, and they record women’s roles and writings within various exilic contexts – classical and contemporary. That contemporary technology is peripheral is unfortunate; that ‘emotional technology’ has emerged, is tactical. The

phrase itself, “emotional technology”, also feels very much like a shard of writing by a woman who-feels-outside-of-something.

Gesa Zinn and Maureen Tobin Stanley’s *Exile through a Gendered Lens: Women’s Displacement in Recent European History, Literature and Cinema* comes closer to addressing contemporary technology – but only as close as the camera’s lens. It might be interesting to speculate how contemporary technologies could have affected some of the mythic relationships presented by Zinn and Stanley. Zinn and Stanley present seven chapters, each by a different woman author, flanked by the editorial couples’ “Introduction” and “Conclusion”. In the first chapter (Paula Hanssen’s “Exile in Letters: Bertolt Brecht’s Collaborators Elisabeth Hauptmann and Margarete Steffin”) much could be made of ‘myth as emotional technology’ if the collaborators concerned here – Hauptmann and Steffin – had access to today’s social media for their craft while writing their plays, stories and poetry. These women couldn’t claim credit for the extent of their contributions to what are now known as Brecht’s plays; in their true roles as equal collaborators, Hauptmann and Steffin have been inscribed by history as silent partners.

Another chapter, “The House of Memory: Exile in Alicia Dujovne Ortiz’s *El árbol de la gitana*”, by Kimberle S. López, is about Dujovne Ortiz’s 1991 autobiographical novel. The story combines elements of Alicia’s political exile from Argentina to France in 1978, when many of her friends were among Argentina’s ‘disappeared’, with stories that an elusive gypsy woman told her about her ancestors. In the end, the gypsy may be Alicia herself. Again, contemporary technology could give this story’s telling an entirely different twist – aspects of Alicia’s gypsy might take some high-tech form or Alicia’s understanding of the gypsy’s genealogies might be informed by social media practices, blogging or podcasts.

“Writing from the Margins, Writing in the Margins: Christa Wolf’s *Medea*” by Adelheid Eubanks considers Wolf’s first post-reunification novel written in temporary exile in the U.S. in 1998, still an early-Internet era. The last three chapters of *Exile through a Gendered Lens* deal with films – and, as such, are the most high-tech of all the essays represented in this review. The book’s editors each tackle a film: Stanley authors “Liberating Mythology: The Intertextual Discourse between Mythological Banishment and Domestic Violence as Exile in *Take My Eyes (Te doy mis ojos)*” and Zinn writes “Souls in Transit: Exilic Journeys in Fatih Akin’s *The Edge of Heaven* (2007)”. My partner’s recuperation from a hysterectomy while I’ve been writing this has let us succumb to subscribing to Netflix, which surprisingly carried both these titles; through WiFi streaming I viewed these two films and encourage others to do so as well.

Finally, in “Female Transnational Migrations and Diasporas in European ‘Immigration Cinema’” Isolina Bellesteros claims that she coined the term “immigration cinema” in an earlier essay “to describe this new genre, one that contains a varied corpus of films representing contemporary immigration – and the ramifications of racism and xenophobia – as well as the heterogeneous immigrant subject. I defined ‘immigrant cinema’ as a subcategory of ‘world cinema’ and ‘third cinema’ treated

¹⁵ Zinn and Maureen Tobin Stanley, eds., *Exile through a Gendered Lens*, 144.

in relation to notions such as hybridity, transculturalism, border crossing, and translation.”¹⁵ She shows how four recent immigration films by European women have begun to undo the invisibility of female migrant experience.

What have been considered to be myths of the migrant – isolation, seclusion and exploitation – are now filmic phenomena. In this way we have come full circle. Yes, Eavan Boland, myth can indeed be a very emotional technology.

“Per un museo postcoloniale”
estetica. studi e ricerche 1 (2012), 220 pp.*

Reviewed by **Monica Calignano**

* For table of contents, abstracts and bios of the authors see http://www.esteticastudiericerche.com/?option=com_content&view=article&id=93%3A12012&Itemid=2&lang=it, 19 Novembre 2013.

The issue 1/2012 of *estetica. studi e ricerche* takes on the new and urgent challenge of outlining the ‘postcolonial museum’. What is this new museum, what are the guidelines that it should follow, what are the urgencies, the concerns, the questions to which it is necessary to find an answer? What will be the discussion provoked by this museum *to come*? Most of all, how, and to what extent, is the museum changing, turning from national into *transnational*, and into a space where the exiled artist might finally be able to build his/her home?

Each of the essays collected in this issue, arranged into three sections, suggests different and possible pathways and guidelines, all of them stemming from the need to rework what has been historically removed – from the museum – by Occidental colonizing cultures. As Iain Chambers points out in his introductory essay, the issue is primarily concerned with the problematic *inclusion* of ‘others’, whose presence has been removed or consciously swept away by traditional criteria of representation and categorization. ‘Including’, however, should only be an initial step, a transitional stage leading to the destruction of these criteria that need to be rethought in order to avoid abiding by a Eurocentric logic. In the transformation of the museum from a “cemetery” and a “crypt” into a migrant network, Chambers effectively proposes the use of postcolonial criticism as a key to deconstruct the narrative apparatus and the logic of the museum itself (9).

As a matter of fact, postcolonial issues can cast light on a criticism that has so far been strictly confined to the field of museum studies. That is exactly what Beatrice Ferrara suggests, in the first section of the issue (*The postcolonial challenge*). In her essay, Ferrara references the London-based artistic duo Otolith Group, and embraces a wider field of research, including the relationship between museum issues and immaterial labour. In their video-essay *Hydra Decapita*, the duo brings to light the confusion resulting from the global crisis of capitalism, and ties up postcolonial and postmodern issues with the spread of immaterial labour, whose growth is to be connected to the relationship between capitalism and migration. In the present moment, art becomes a way of giving expression to this confusion and, at the same time, of dispelling it. The waves generated by images on the screen – those of the sea, the nomadic archive *par excellence* – are reflected in the vibrations of the afrofuturistic electronic music duo Drexciya, whose sound opens up to a new sensorial and affective relationship among images, sounds and viewers.

Vibrations recur also in the essay by Parati, Postiglione and Pozzi who, presenting the [MeLA project](#) (European Museums in an Age of Migration), draw attention to *vibrations* and to the *multiplicity/complex order* couple. The new

museum will have to embrace the vibrations generated in the encounter between objects and viewers. It will introduce a new artistic-architectonic practice by the theoretical-methodological principle of *multiplicity*. This will violate the narrative unity and replace it with neither a linear nor a chronological *complex order*, which, in turn, will raise many questions rather than provide ultimate answers.

By establishing a co-productive relationship between subject and object, vibrations open up the possibility for a collaborative relationship. It is on this relationship that community museums, such as the District Six Museum in Cape Town, South Africa, are grounded. Alessandra De Angelis connects this museum with memorial museums (exemplified, in her article, by the Jewish Museum in Berlin), as both are able to suggest counter-narratives of traumatic events. However, although both museums deeply engage with the senses of their viewers, the Berlin museum, even more than the South African one, tends increasingly to replace the dialogue with an internal monologue within the represented community. The result, as with many other memorial and community museums, is the exclusion of those who do not belong to that community.

Issues of inclusion/exclusion are also debated in the article by Mariangela Orabona, which focuses on the marginality/centrality of the black body within the museum space. The black artists take possession of this space, which has always been racially characterized, often by adopting strategies of resistance that ‘mine’ the museum from the inside. This is the case for artists such as Fred Wilson, and especially Kara Walker, whose oversexed African silhouettes disrupt and explode the monolithic environment of the museum. Similarly the original installation *Museo della Normalità Europea* (*The Museum of European Normality*), which was presented during Manifesta 7 (2008) and which Giulia Grechi analyzes in detail in her article, can be presented as another example of deconstructing the traditional order of things in museums. By means of irony and provocation, this installation succeeds in presenting a reversed ethnography, where the very ‘normality’ of European peoples is questioned and looked at, rather than the traditional framing of the ‘strangeness’ of colonized peoples. It is an absolute reversal that involves not only forms but also contents, and goes so far as to engage with the archive itself, which turns into a place where absences, rather than presences, are stored.

To rethink the museum of the future means first and foremost to uncover and subvert the established principles of cataloguing and archiving, which are Western, patriarchal principles; these will fragment and crumble in the presence of the emerging principles of others. This is the idea that the three articles in the second section of the issue, *Future Archives*, share. Here the *female other* emerges, strongly but lightly at the same time. Here, the *feminine* phases in speech finally become a speaking and acting subject. In the performances of the artists Zineb Sedira, Lalla Essaydi and Zoulikha Bouabdellah, which Silvana Carotenuto presents in her article, the doors of the archive open wide to house memory of the past – the colonial past, the diaspora, the exile – and, at the same time, portend a drive towards the future. In recovering their roots, their *mother* tongue, their maternal

dimension (Sedira), these women take back the word, which also means writing, and writing on their bodies (Essaydi) – those same bodies whose eroticism is, in Islamic culture, to be totally reinvented (Bouabdellah).

To finally welcome the woman – the *patriarchive* turns into a *matriarchive* – means also to imagine and build a flexible archive that might implicate the fluidity that distinguishes both women's nature and their diasporic writing, as Manuela Esposito suggests in her article. Such an archive merges with the ground (the desert) and the water. Sedira's videos and Roni Horn's photographs, with their liquid fabrics, show the deep relationship between the human and the natural worlds, whereas the ground becomes the ultimate archive in the works by Vietnamese critic and director Trinh T. Minh-ha, who replaces the alleged emptiness of the desert with a counterpointal, full sonority.

The relationship between women and nature, the centrality of sound, and the 'suspended' dimension of the desert space, also recur in the essay by Annalisa Piccirillo, which concludes this second section. The focus here is on dance, the most difficult art to archive, being as it is so closely linked to the performative moment. Dance, however, turns the human body into a living archive, constantly on the move, and inscribes in the body of the dancer the memory of the movement. By escaping materiality and gravity, the dancing bodies choreographed by the artist Isabel Rocamora refuse rationality and the burden imposed by the rules of the *patriarchive*; dance becomes light, aerial, intangible: in a word, *antigravitational*.

Zineb Sedira's works display women's will to express, to occupy a space of their own and to subvert the pre-established order. These issues are also present in the article by Celeste Ianniciello, in the third part of the volume (*Excavating museum spaces*). Both Sedira and the artist Mona Hatoum aim at recovering lost and removed memories, whereas Lara Baladi's artistic collages allude to the act of collecting in order to recompose the rifts of the past. Baladi's works especially show the clear intent of transcending the museum's space, of tearing down its white walls, and, in the end, of setting up what Ianniciello calls *the museum of the world* (in contrast to the traditional, obsolete, *museum of the nation*). In a similar fashion, Viviana Gravano firmly criticizes traditional museum logic in her article, taking as a starting point the ethno-anthropological dynamics enacted at the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris. According to Gravano, the French museum takes on a neocolonial attitude in removing, without mincing words, the presence of the 'other', which it frames, over again, within Western categorizations. The result is a form of neo-orientalism that erects impenetrable barriers among different cultures.

Acting as a counterpart to this closed, fixed, monolithic museum, there are the two counter-examples proposed by Gianluca Gatta and Giusy Muzzopappa: although different from one another, a museum in Bristol and the one in Lampedusa both share the theme of 'the passage' – in the first case the Atlantic passage, and in the second one the passage across the Mediterranean Sea. Despite the pressures exerted by the Caribbean community, which perceives itself as directly involved in

the narration of the British slave trade, the attempts made by the Bristol museum to give voice to this historical inheritance have so far not been very effective. On the contrary, the small museum of migration in Lampedusa is specifically aimed at bringing to light the counter-narrative of the landings that have affected the island for the last twenty years, and allowing a critical and emotional reflection about the phenomenon to emerge. However, it is still to be seen whether the museum will succeed in effectively involving the protagonists in the stories that it seeks to assemble and relay.

Lidia Curti concludes this issue of *estetica*. After summarizing the previous pieces, stressing their common intents and itineraries, Curti opens up a possible new space through reflecting on contemporary Indian art. The works of the artists Abhishek Hazra, Tejal Shah, Sarnath Banjeree and Pushpamala N., that were exhibited at the MAXXI museum in Rome (October 2011 – January 2012), gives the author the opportunity to reflect not only upon the artistic and political importance of the work of art, but also on the creative process that produces it. The exhibition in Rome seeks to do justice to this aspect, not only by emphasizing the matter and the material of which the work of art is made, but also through the reshaping of the museal spaces, which literally *bend* to the needs of the exhibited works. Moreover, the active participation of the artists in the exhibition's organization opens one last, crucial question: is it possible to highlight, inside the museum, the *production* of the work of art, beyond its reproduction and representation, and, therefore, to think of a museum that might ultimately be able to balance the official narrative with counter-tales?

These are the questions that the museum of the future – the *postcolonial* museum, the *postmuseum* – will have to answer.

Sandra Ponzanesi and Marguerite Waller, eds.,
Postcolonial Cinema Studies
(London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 250 pp.

Reviewed by **Michaela Quadraro**

The legacy of colonialism is evident in contemporary societies, where questions of belonging and citizenship are displaced by migratory and transcultural movements. Colonial experience is therefore not an abstract entity, but a complex and continuous process that produces intervals, passages, and interstices. In a postcolonial perspective all these questions are investigated in the attempt to reveal the violence that is at the core of Western hegemony. Thus, the postcolonial question does not become a temporal succession, but a critical and historical interruption in the grand narratives transmitted within European parameters.

The essays included in this volume should be read bearing such contextual frame in mind. This volume constitutes a rich and heterogeneous source of references and critical elaborations that give a significant contribution to the field of postcolonial studies. In particular, through the close analysis of films, this book tries to map possible encounters between cinema and postcolonial studies. Cinema confirms itself as a powerful example of the deep interrelation between the experience of colonialism and the complexity of the contemporary world. What matters in particular is how cinema engages with history, subjectivity, and the political and material developments. As its two editors declare, this volume does not aim at proposing a postcolonial cinema as a fixed genre or a taxonomy. The films explored in the chapters come from different contexts; however, they are here read together through a “postcolonial lens”, “allowing us to unpack their visual codes and narrative discourses of supremacy and to discover their tensions and aporias” (11-12). Following the interdisciplinary nature of the postcolonial paradigm, the extremely rich introduction to the volume weaves the threads of philosophical thinking, feminist theory, and cultural studies approach, together with the recent visual imaginaries developed in the context of exile, displacement, and diaspora. Therefore, cinematic practices come to extend the conceptual space of postcolonial critique.

The book is organised into four parts. The first one, called *Cinemas of Empire*, discusses the so-called ‘empire films’ that contribute to postcolonial studies through the reflection on nineteenth-century ideological construction of empire. Ruth Ben-Ghiat outlines the tragic history of Italian expansionism in Lybia in her discussion of the silent movie *Kif Tebbi*, an empire film made in 1928 and set in this region. In her essay Julie Codell discusses the use of blackface in 1930s British and American colonial films, combining her analysis of several empire films with Gilles Deleuze’s and Félix Guattari’s concept of ‘faciality’. As an ambivalent and complex colonial representation, blackface parodies differences of race and class,

but also performs colony nostalgia, “a desire to return to a time when empire was considered unquestionably heroic” (41). Finally, the postcolonial framework allows author Anikó Imre to resist the pleasures of the socialist national epic and underscores a map of hybridities and contradictions.

The second part, entitled *Postcolonial Cinemas: Unframing Histories*, not only undoes “established historical accounts and fixed geographies” but also rediscovers the multilayered histories and frames of local spaces through cinema (62). Hamish Ford analyses three films that mark important moments in France’s colonial and postcolonial history. Gillo Pontecorvo’s *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), Ousmane Sembene’s *Camp de Thiaroye* (1987), and Michael Haneke’s *Cache/Hidden* reveal, in Ford’s essay, the ambivalence of the self/other dichotomy and its complicated psychic mechanisms. In Jude G. Akudinobi’s essay the repressed memories of the colonial oppression come back to haunt the present, as highlighted in his discussion of the film *Fatima, L’Algérienne de Dakar* (Med Hondo, 2004). A reflection on the consequences and the multiple histories of colonialism in the contemporary world is again very important for Mireille Rosello’s analysis of the work made by Morocco-born filmmaker Philippe Faucon and for Mariam B. Lam’s investigation of postcolonial Indochinese cinema.

In the third part *Postcolonial Cinemas: Postcolonial Aesthetics* the focus is on the innovative strategies proposed in the filmmaking practices that subvert representation. In doing this, postcolonial cinema has always engaged deeply with the traditional cinematic paradigms. Paulo de Medeiros, in particular, discusses the strategies and the formal construction of some Lusophone films that express on a formal level the complexity of memory and the “spectral postcoloniality” of the present time. The question of the strategies employed by cinema is central also to Sabine Doran’s essay on postcolonial aesthetics. In this chapter the author links the recent turn of critical theory to a more sensorial analysis of cinema with the groundbreaking techniques proposed by Surrealist artists in the 1930s. Concluding this section, on the one hand, Marguerite Waller’s chapter evokes the haunting presence of the Italian fascist era through the analysis of the film *Luna e l’altra* (Maurizio Nichetti, 1996); on the other hand, Sandra Ponzanesi investigates two films made by diasporic female artists that give a huge contribution both to the field of adaptation studies and the postcolonial perspective: *Bride and Prejudice* by Gurinder Chadha and *Women Without Men* by Shirin Neshat. In the latter film, in particular, Ponzanesi finds a very interesting example of a postcolonial feminist strategy that intervenes critically and proposes alternative theoretical tools.

The fourth and final part of the book is entitled *Postcolonial Cinemas and Globalisation*. In this section the focus is on the forms of production and distribution of cinema and particularly on “resistance and alternative forms of agency” (189). Through the analysis of the science-fiction dystopian film *Children of Men* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2006), Shohini Chaudhuri investigates the legacy of old stereotypical discourses of Orientalism in today’s wars on terrors and measures of detention. A postcolonial reading of this film reveals the violence of contemporary neo-colonial

forms of imperialism. Subsequently, Kanika Batra's and Rich Rice's chapter on Mira Nair's film *Monsoon Wedding* (2001) attempts to trace a postcolonial theory of new media from the concept of "transcoding", "a convergence of layers of media, technology, and culture that generates new layers of meaning" (205). In this analysis Bollywood cinema constructs a technological postcolonial space and displaces binary oppositions of local and global, Indian and diasporic, innovative and traditional. Concluding this section on globalisation, Claudia Hoffmann highlights the crucial role of self-sustained and hand-held digital technologies for the production and the dissemination of Nigerian films. By doing so, Nollywood cinema is an example of a creative practice that proposes an alternative to the Western dynamics of funding and exhibition. Furthermore, it traverses the borders of a Nigerian audience and spreads over across diasporic African communities in the world.

The heterogeneous and stimulating issues developed in this volume are further expanded in a conversation between editor Marguerite Waller and postcolonial cinema studies theorist Priya Jaikumar. Far from providing a conclusion, this interview is considered as a "postface" that opens outward and poses methodological and pedagogical questions. Jaikumar stresses the impossibility to give a definition for postcolonial theory and cinema. She invites us to build our own optics and to keep it open-ended, "making connections between theory, concept, and image or narrative" (237). Her words, which conclude this book, emphasise the powerful affective potential of film and encourage readers to engage with the productive and interdisciplinary challenge offered by postcolonial studies.

Carla Macoggi, *Kkeywa. Storia di una bimba meticcia*
(Roma: Sensibili alle Foglie, 2011), 104 pp.

Carla Macoggi, *La nemesi della rossa*
(Roma: Sensibili alle Foglie, 2012), 104 pp.

Reviewed by **Fidelia Veltre**

The world of Italian publishing has recently been enriched by the stimulating contributions of a new generation of Italian-speaking writers of foreign origin. These authors' works mainly deal with topics such as the condition of exile, the difficulty of asserting migrants' identity and rights against prejudice and discrimination and the defense of their roots and culture, giving rise to a new genre, migration literature, which I would define as an Italian version of postcolonial literature. Their writing is characterized by something the Kenyan writer, activist and performer Shailja Patel has defined as "migritude", conjoining 'migrant' and 'attitude' in a single term. As she explains in a number of interviews, this neologism allows her to confront two different aspects of the will to migrate, whether by choice or the need to survive, that affect the lives of millions of people caught up in the political and economic processes of global society. It is also the title she gives to a performance and a book that brings together her poems, letters, interviews and the backstage diary of her performances (*Migritude*, New York: Kaya Press, 2010).

Migration literature in Italy is quite a recent phenomenon, beginning in the 90s, and is still in a relatively early stage. Its late start may be due to the nature of Italian colonial experience, which was shorter and more limited than that of other European colonial powers (lasting from 1882 until the Second World War, and restricted to Libya and the Horn of Africa), but also to the fact that Italian was far less widespread than other languages expressing imperial power, such as English, Spanish, French and Portuguese. In the last few years this literary production in Italy has found an outlet in online magazines such as *Eks&Tra* and *El Ghibli*, or literary prizes such as the "Concorso Letterario Nazionale Lingua Madre". Migration literature is also promoted through creative writing workshops, theatrical and musical performances, public readings, websites and blogs, forming a lively mix of different languages where the idea of migrancy is no longer just connected to trouble and hardship but also to creative and positive energy. The more established authors prefer not to be classified as 'migrant writers'; a label they see as locking them in a ghetto and limiting the subjects they deal with; it is time, they feel, that they should be considered to be new Italian writers in all respects.

There is now a wide range of interesting literary proposals by writers – especially women – from the old Italian colonies, living in Italy as first- or second-generation immigrants (as, for example, Cristina Ali Farah and Igiaba Scego). Among the

most noteworthy women writers are Ribka Sibhatu and Erminia Dell'Oro from Eritrea; Farah, Scego and Kaha Mohamed Aden from Somalia, Gabriella Ghermandi, Maria Abbebù Viarengo and Martha Nasibù from Ethiopia, Luciana Capretti from Libya. While all of them have made the choice of 'writing back' by taking possession of the Italian language in a creative and original way, there is considerably variety in their style of writing and in the use they make of Italian, sometimes including words or expressions from their mother tongue or reflecting the orality of traditional African literature in their narratives. A case apart is that of Carla Macoggi.

One of the most recent authors, Macoggi was born in Addis Ababa in 1965 from an Ethiopian mother and an Italian father. After her childhood in Ethiopia, she moved to Italy and settled in Bologna, where she graduated in Law. She has published short stories – "Luna", in *Lingua Madre Duemilanove* (Torino: Seb27, 2009); "Enea" (*Nigrizia*, January 2010); "A Taitu piaceva il Filowha", in *Roma d'Abissinia* (Cuneo: Nerosubianco, 2010) – and two closely inter-connected novels.

Kkeywa. Storia di una bimba meticcica (2011) tells the story of a child, Fiorella, the daughter of an Ethiopian woman and an Italian man, who was forced to move to Italy at the age of twelve, uprooted from her home and deprived of her rights, identity and family ties – an indirect long-term effect of the Italian colonial past. Published for the first time in 2004 by Sovera Multimedia with the title *La via per il Paradiso*, the novel was modified in the 2011 edition. In the preface to the second edition, the author gives greater depth to the subject of her story by framing it in its historical background – colonial and postcolonial Ethiopia. She also discusses the phenomenon of hybridization, examining it from both a cultural and legal perspective and including an analysis of the fascist laws about relations between Italian colonizers and native people. Although Fiorella's father dies early in his daughter's life (or, rather, the man Fiorella believes to be her father – only in Macoggi's second novel, *La nemesi della rossa*, will the identity of her true father be revealed), his figure is central to the novel, representing the 'human aspect of colonialism'; for him, fatherhood was a private chance of redemption against the public responsibility of an Army officer sent to Africa to serve the purpose of the Italian Empire, under Mussolini's dictatorship. Despite his example, no balance is possible between the rights of the colonized and those of the colonizers.

Kkeywa in Amharic stands for hybrid, half-breed, clear skin, red-head – the identity the child wrestles with through a series of traumatic experiences, beginning during her early years in Ethiopia. Compelled to leave her daughter while she tries to recover the possessions she has lost during the riots that broke out after the coup d'état in 1974, Fiorella's natural mother sends her to a pension, run by Romana Gridoni, an elderly Italian emigrant, who pretends to be the child's aunt and forces her to work for her. Leading her to believe her mother has abandoned her, Fiorella's 'aunt' subjects her to a process of out-and-out Italianization, in keeping with Fascist colonial policy intended to save and separate the Italian 'blood' of mixed race children from contamination from their non-Italian

elements, as Macoggi explains in a [recent interview](#) with Eugenia Foddai on Radio Onda d'Urto. Already physically and affectively separated from her mother, the child is also made to lose her mother tongue, cultural roots and the whole of her natural mother's world when she is no longer allowed to attend Amharic lessons at school. Finally, at the end of the novel, she is torn from her original homeland: on the flight from Addis Ababa to Rome with Romana, Fiorella's fragile world falls apart and she breaks down.

The story of Fiorella, hovering between two different identities and communities, Italian and Ethiopian, raises the issue of a third possibility, that of hybridization. Macoggi's work is based on an anxious search for cultural identity from an in-between position. This way to self-assertion is complicated by the historical implications of Italian colonialism and its present long-term effects. Although Macoggi's novels are undoubtedly less stimulating linguistically than the work of authors such as Farah, Aden, Ghermandi and Scego, as they show no attempt to contaminate the Italian language with the author's mother tongue or with the characteristics of traditional oral culture, this is an issue that finds its explanation within the texts themselves, in the painful process of Italianization to which their little protagonist is subjected.

Despite the depth of the questions it raises, *Kkeywa* is marred by its excessive sentimentality and the prolixity of the author's style. Nevertheless, I see it as a useful addition to migration literature, particularly as a text to be adopted in Italian schools, where it could encourage a more informed and critical approach to the colonial past and its effects in the increasingly multilingual and multicultural condition of present-day Italy, and consequently as a way of stimulating debate on intercultural education.

Macoggi's second novel, *La nemesi della rossa* (2012), which continues the story of *Kkeywa*, is a far more satisfying work from a literary point of view, due also to its more original, self-reflexively hybrid technique since the novel is half memoir, half theatrical script. In her interview with Eugenia Foddai, Macoggi insists that neither of her novels is to be considered as an example of autobiographical writing, which she seems to take as implying 'objectivity' and an exact reconstruction of events. Although some of the experiences of her protagonist echo her own, the character of Fiorella does not coincide with Carla. As the narrative is mainly based on affective memory, her works fall rather into the category of memoir.

In her new novel, Macoggi takes up the story of Fiorella at exactly the point in which she had left her at the end of *Kkeywa*: in 1977, when her sudden and incomprehensible departure for Italy leads to temporary residence in the new country. After a brief return to Ethiopia, she moves definitively back to Italy, where Romana leaves her in a convent in Bologna. There she stays until the age of sixteen, when she goes to live with a foster family belonging to CL, the *Comunione e Liberazione* movement (a lay ecclesial Catholic movement founded in 1954 by the theologian Luigi Giussani). After a series of misunderstandings, she returns to the convent, where the nuns pocket all the money she earns from her occasional,

underpaid job as babysitter. She attends the Law faculty at Bologna university and goes to live on her own with other students who are members of CL, but on graduation she loses her State aid and suddenly becomes poor and homeless. Appealed to for help, her former foster family misunderstands her terrible hunger and stress – ending in a nervous breakdown – and abandons her, at the age of 24, in the psychiatric ward of a hospital.

This part of the story seems almost to be written in a state of hypnosis, as if the author were actually feeling the same anxiety as her protagonist, communicated through the throbbing rhythm of her writing. Little by little, Fiorella succeeds in taking control of her life and decides to search for government documents in order to reconstruct the events of her life in Italy. The truth is eventually uncovered: when she settled in Italy, Romana was appointed to be her adoptive mother under Ethiopian law and her guardian in Italy, with Terza (Romana's sister), as her deputy-guardian; should she have trouble, she could rely on the help of a probate judge, a possibility she had never even been aware of. Above all, she finds out that Romana, Terza, the foster family and the nuns had all received State aid in order to take care of her, while all along she had spent her whole time in Italy in a condition of uncertainty, poverty, affective instability, solitude, economic exploitation, psychological abuse. With unbearable hypocrisy, everything was supposed to be done “for the girl's own good” (51, my translation). All decisions were made for her by others, with no explanations: during each of her several moves, someone silently packed for her, but it was actually Fiorella who was being packed away. The style suddenly changes in the final part and the memoir turns into a theatrical script. A trial is performed, involving all the characters, through a stage trick I prefer not to disclose.

More than a geographical and cultural journey, *La nemesi della rossa* tells about the journey of a soul, as the novel is based on the protagonist's difficult journey to adulthood and the difficulties she has to face in order to claim her right to exist. Normal development is inhibited and censored throughout: “Is it possible they taught me not to speak? Who could have made me an infant forever?” (55, my translation). The work forcefully denounces the bigotry, hypocrisy and sordidness typical of some of the religious groups the girl encounters. Free expression of her personality and gender identity is repressed, distorting her relationship with males and her perception of sex. In order to make herself loved and accepted, Fiorella submits to every possible form of control and censorship, renouncing her right to privacy and becoming more and more invisible: “If anything happened, what exactly I don't know, it would definitely be the woman's fault, the nuns used to say.... So I made myself shapeless and indistinct. So as not to be guilty” (47, my translation).

Repression involves every aspect of her life. Both with the nuns and the foster family, and most particularly in the presence of Romana, Fiorella's opinions and emotions are silenced and she is allowed neither to laugh nor cry. In addition to the vulnerability brought on by her lack of parental protection and care, is the

marginality and fragility caused by her hybridity, immediately visible in the colour of her skin. Her in-between condition – neither African, nor completely Italian – makes her development even more complicated.

In his preface, Fulvio Pezzarossa (a professor of the Sociology of Literature at Bologna University and the editor of *Scritture Migranti. Rivista di Scambi Interculturali*) describes the book as “a text which is able to give substance to a new season for our Literature” (12, my translation), pointing out the force with which it raises the question of avoiding an over-hasty fixing of a canonical form in postcolonial writing. Among the aspects of Macoggi’s writing he focuses on is the unusual female version of the Western colonizer, embodied by the character of Romana Gridoni. The old Italian woman is arrogant, cynical, racist, with a strong sexual appetite, always ready to exploit other people, so that the traditional patriarchal position of power seems to fit her perfectly. From a linguistic point of view, Pezzarossa underlines the author’s knowledge and command of Italian: her use of the language turns it into a fundamental element for social recognition and equal interaction, enabling her to emerge from the shadows and make herself visible and alive. “When I learned Italian the world grew larger. The names of things multiplied, but I could reveal this novelty only to myself”, the author writes (59, my translation). Her writing is thus a therapeutic instrument, allowing her to develop her repressed personality and no longer obey the injunction to exist in silence. Writing, Pezzarossa comments, is a ‘way of healing’, because it can alleviate the suffering of soul and repair its lacerations, so that each piece of the mosaic can return to its true position and the whole picture be completed.

Even though the novel weeps tears of sorrow in each line, the author is able to experience the power of the word and use it for Fiorella/Carla’s final redemption, as announced in the title of the book. Thus, the protagonist finally recovers her lightness and looks confidently towards her future, as we read in the epilogue: “Everything is enormously heavy. The secret lies in encapsulating the stone in a cloud to make it light” (97, my translation).

In her radio interview, Macoggi emphasizes that far from being limited to the microcosm of her individual experience; her story is intended to provide evidence that can be used in avoiding similar cases of injustice and abuse encouraging respect for the rights of migrant children: “Fiorella has suffered for everybody. That’s enough!” (my translation). Like the other female writers from Eastern Africa who are animating the scene of migration literature in Italy, she shows how important it is to take the floor and break through the silence of exile. Writing plays a significant role in a process of emancipation that involves culture, psychology, social status and gender identity. The authors’ double marginality, as women (in a world that is still largely dominated by men) and as writers with a foreign origin, impels them to action and creativity.

BOOKS RECEIVED

Maurizio Calbi, *Spectral Shakespeares: Media Adaptations in the Twenty-First Century* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 252 pp.

ISBN 978-0-230-33875-3

EUR 55,00

John Kinsella ed., *Spatial Relations. Volume One: Essays, Reviews, Commentaries, and Choreography*, with an introduction by Gordon Collier (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2013), xvii+573 pp.

ISBN 978-90-420-3677-2

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ISBN 978-90-420-3678-9

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Aaron Mushengyezi, *Oral Literature for Children: Rethinking Orality, Literacy, Performance, and Documentation Practices* (Amsterdam and New York, Rodopi, 2013), xli+311 pp.

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